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RUSSIAN NATIONALISM

IMAGINARIES, DOCTRINES, AND POLITICAL BATTLEFIELDS

Marlene Laruelle

Russian Nationalism

This book, by one of the foremost authorities on the subject, explores the complex nature of Russian nationalism. It examines nationalism as a multi-layered and multifaceted repertoire displayed by a myriad of actors. It considers nationalism as various concepts and ideas emphasizing Russia's distinctive national character, based on the country's geography, history, Orthodoxy, and Soviet technological advances. It analyzes the ideologies of Russia's ultra-nationalist and far-right groups, explores the use of nationalism in the conflict with Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea, and discusses how Putin's political opponents, including Alexei Navalny, make use of nationalism. Overall the book provides a rich analysis of a key force which is profoundly affecting political and societal developments both inside Russia and beyond.

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Marlene Laruelle

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Introduction

This book is comprised of nine chapters, many of which have been published previously as articles in peer-reviewed journals or as chapters in edited volumes.[1] All have been updated and reframed to create a unified whole that provides a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon of "Russian nationalism." There are many ways of interpreting the amorphous term "nationalism." In this book I explore it as a multilayered and multifaceted repertoire: nationalism as an imperial imaginary of the nation; nationalism as an experiment of doctrines and ideologies; and nationalism as a political battlefield between grassroots actors and state structures.

A brief history of "Russian nationalism" studies[2]

Western scholarship on Russia has always devoted substantial attention to national identity issues, both to explain Russia's "difference" from the West and as part of a mirror game with Russia's national tradition of debating the so-called Russian Idea. Although the study of identity in Russia includes a broad spectrum of approaches that encompass all branches of the social sciences and humanities – identity may be social, religious, ethnic, gender, regional, or economic in addition to national – the study of "Russian nationalism" has become a research field in its own right.

As a scholarly topic, the term emerged in the 1960s with works on imperial Russia's main schools of thought: Slavophilism, Pan-Slavism, and conservatism.[3] This rediscovery of nineteenth-century Russian political philosophy took on a life of its own in the Cold War context, as the consensus grew that a knowledge of Marxism and revolutionary thinking was no longer enough to comprehend Soviet society and Soviet foreign policy. A new wave of Western scholarship thus examined Russian conservative traditions, which had previously been overlooked in favor of revolutionary authors and Russia's rich leftist schools of thought.

In the second half of the 1970s and the early 1980s, the emphasis changed from nineteenth-century conservative philosophies to contemporary Soviet society, as authors such as John Dunlop, Alexander Yanov, and Walter Laqueur drew attention to what they defined as a "revival" of Russian nationalism.[4] These

authors identified and examined a paradox: the rising interest in topics identified as nationalist among Soviet dissidents and the parallel growth in interest among the official Soviet intelligentsia. This included the rediscovery of the imperial past and the protection of Russia's historical legacy and nature, expressed mostly through "village prose" literature and art.[5] It also took the form of an informal "Russian Party" within state and Communist Party structures, targeting more pragmatic goals such as dissociating the RSFSR (Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic) institutions from the pan-Soviet ones and fighting to promote Russians as a weakened nation endangered by the Soviet federal construction.[6]

The perestroika years and the collapse of the Soviet Union inaugurated a "golden age" for studying nationalism, which was no longer confined to Russia but encompassed all the (post-)Soviet nations.[7] The deep upheavals of these countries, which had become independent in very different political contexts, were interpreted as a "reawakening" of the peoples once under Russian/Soviet domination. "Nationalism" thus tended to be conceived within a binary schema: the nationalism of the non-Russian peoples, insofar as it was democratic and anti-colonial – often correlated with the pro-democratic "popular fronts" of the Gorbachev years – was deemed healthy. But that of the Russians – symbolized by Pamiat, the main "cadres' school" and umbrella organization of Russian nationalists, which had a strong anti-Semitic and reactionary bent – was criticized as conservative, autocratic, and imperialistic.[8]

Few works at the time sought to recognize and explore this implicit distinction between *good* and *bad* nationalism, a categorization that hinged on whether the nationalism under discussion was seen as pro- or anti-reform – an issue that is still critical in today's readings of what nationalism means politically. The intuitive character of this binary and its immediate policy implications for Western countries' foreign policy – namely supporting the new states against a historically dominant Russia – were enough to render it legitimate. The dearth of studies on the nationalist features of Russian liberal politicians, from Boris Yeltsin to Egor Gaidar and Anatolii Chubais, is evidence of the difficulty many Western observers had in pinning the "nationalism" label on the political allies of the moment. The same trend would reappear 20 years later with the reluctance of Western pundits to describe President Vladimir Putin's main opponent, Alexei Navalny, as a "nationalist."

In the 1990s, this dual schema continued to develop. Studying "Russian nationalism" was always part of a broader discourse about Russia's "problem."[9] The medical metaphors multiplied: the *body* of Russia was *sick*, nationalism was a *cancer* or a case of *gangrene* for which *medication* or *cures* must be found, and so on. Weimar Germany came to serve as the main historical analogy for Russia in the early 1990s, with scholars focusing on the eccentric far-right personality of Vladimir Zhirinovsky and looking for parallels to Hitler's (or Mussolini's) rise to power.[10] The various "nationalisms" of the other peoples of the former Soviet Union, meanwhile, were judged far more positively: Baltic nationalisms and, to a lesser extent, their Ukrainian, Moldovan, and Georgian counterparts were praised for contributing to the democratization of their republics

and their engagement with the West, while their ethnocentric "excesses" were excused as corollaries to a necessary phase of national political construction.

A similar reading marked the study of non-Russian nationalisms inside Russia, as long as they were conceived of as engines of the country's democratization, which translated to decentralizing federalism. Tatarstan and Yakutia top the list of Western scholars' most fetishized republics.[11] The concept of Russia as a civic nation of *Rossiiane* (Russian citizens), promoted by Yeltsin at the time, was studied more as Moscow's answer to the nationalism of the ethnic republics than for its complex relationship to the "ethnic majority" and the notion of Russia's "Russianness." Regions or countries that experienced mass violence and/or secessionist movements – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, Chechnya, and Tajikistan – formed an entirely separate category of research: nationalism there was no longer studied as a mostly ideological production, but instead as case studies to understand the social drivers and geopolitical stakes that led to such deadlock.[12] In this category, only the works devoted to Russian minorities in the "near abroad" attempted to situate "Russian nationalism" in a broader social and political context, and to provide a cultural analysis of the motifs linked to nationalism, far removed from medical metaphors. In this regard, studies on the Baltic countries' Russian minorities have been the most fruitful, mainly thanks to the works of David Laitin and Pål Kolstø,[13] and to the literature appraising Brubaker's concept of "nationalizing states."[14]

In the 2000s, the tools used to analyze "Russian nationalism" transformed. Nationalism progressively moved from being an indicator of Russia's reactionaries rejecting the changes of the 1990s to become the main accusation leveled at Putin. As early as Yeltsin's second term (1996–1999), scholars such as Fiona Hill discerned the reemergence of patriotic themes and the jettisoning of the Western rhetoric that had prevailed in the first years of post-Soviet Russia.[15] Yet it was not until the first years of Putin's presidency that the qualifier "nationalist" became widely used to denounce Kremlin policies.

These transformations resulted in several shifts in focus. First, the field of "Russian nationalism" was no longer dominated by political philosophy but replaced by political science, which provided the leading paradigms on Russia in the 2000s.[16] The reforms implemented by Putin constituted a textbook case of how theories on the nature of Russia's post-Soviet regime – undemocratic, illiberal, authoritarian, patronal, and so on – have intersected with nationalism, sometimes from the perspective of "ethnic policies,"[17] but more often to frame Russia's authoritarian curse and the revival of nationalism as mutually reinforcing dynamics. This period also saw the reemergence of the field of international affairs, for which nationalism provided an easy lens for understanding Russia's foreign policy. The qualifier of nationalism has been deployed to describe Moscow's assertive great-power narrative and the Kremlin's critical attitude toward Western – and especially US – posturing in international affairs. It has also been used to describe the "aggressiveness" of Russian policy toward those countries in the "near abroad" most resistant to Moscow's influence, such as Georgia and Ukraine. The term "nationalism" has thus been used as a catch-all that advances a

description of Russian foreign policy in categories it is assumed are intuitively understood.[18]

The second shift was that non-Russian forms of nationalism suddenly became either totally sidelined or integrated into other scholarly debates. The "power vertical" that ended Russia's asymmetrical federalism also eliminated much of the interest that Western scholars had had in the identities of the republics. The topic of "Russia's regions," so fashionable in the 1990s, likewise lost its appeal.[19] The hot spots of the North Caucasus faded from debates on post-colonial nationalism and entered the narrower arena of the "war on terror," with links to "radical Islamism" – another fuzzy term in the contemporary scholarly and policy vocabulary. The post-Soviet states, for their part, were no longer studied from the perspective of nationalism but from that of state-building – with debates around the introduction of new school textbooks, historical commemorations, and civic identity. Yet research on "Russian nationalism" was rarely connected with the topic of Russia's new statehood and the need for the authorities to systematize a pantheon of the nation that would move the country from its imperial past to a nation-state,[20] as if the two realms were totally dissociated.

Third, "Russian nationalism" became articulated with other vague notions such as patriotism, conservatism, and fascism. The difficulty in defining in a precise, scholarly manner how these terms differ, which realities they cover, and how they do – or do not – intersect with one another has become a vicious new trap for both research and policy debates. Russia, for instance, was often refused by Western observers the right to be genuinely patriotic, as this would be an outcome of Putin's "authoritarianism" and the sign of a hidden "nationalism." The authorities' branding of Russia as the bearer of Christian, conservative values also became synonymous with nationalism; very few scholarly works have attempted to navigate the semantic differences between conservatism and nationalism. The 2014 Ukraine crisis, meanwhile, has fanned the flames of fascism. Rutgers University professor Alexander Motyl defined Putin's Russia as a "fully authoritarian political system with a personalistic dictator and a cult of the leader."[21] Accordingly, he invited the international community to avoid using euphemisms such as authoritarian or illiberal and encouraged them to stop being afraid of using the "f-word" (i.e., fascist).[22] Motyl was joined by Yale professor Timothy Snyder, who drew a parallel between Russia's annexation of Crimea and war in Donbas, on the one hand, and Germany annexing the Sudetenland and then Austria, on the other, boldly stating, "Vladimir Putin has chosen to rehabilitate the alliance between Hitler and Stalin that began World War II."[23] Since this irresponsible inflation of accusations, "Russian nationalism" and "Russian/Putin's fascism" have appeared as synonymous terms in some of the literature, which has muddied the scholarly debate even further.[24]

More positively, in the second half of the 2000s, the study of Russian nationalism shifted again, this time in favor of sociology, anthropology, and cultural studies, which had to that point been mostly absent from the debate. Content analyses of ideological transformations and typologies of far-right movements are still widely developed,[25] but they are now just one of many avenues of

research. The rise of xenophobia, for instance, necessitated new, more sociologically grounded, research foci.[26] Works on youth subculture multiplied, studying Nashi and other pro-presidential movements, as well as the culture of street violence that encompasses both the skinheads and the *antifa* (anti-fascist) groups.[27] Gender studies were also eventually integrated into the field,[28] yet the intimate link between nationalism and masculinity in Russia remains unstudied. A growing number of scholars have begun to explore how Russian-speaking "diasporas" have forged their relationship to Russia and respond to – or ignore – Moscow's calls to engage in favor of the country, as well as how "near abroad" countries have instrumentalized Russia's pressures to garner support from the West.[29] The role of the Russians in the Soviet regime, too, has been widely revisited thanks to newly available archival sources, and the debate over the imperial nature of the Soviet Union continues to divide scholars.[30]

Most importantly, a new trend of understanding nationalism in a broader societal and cultural context has emerged. It has sought to interpret the success of Kremlin-backed "patriotism" as the driver of social consensus in an otherwise deeply divided country. In this framework, the role of memory studies and the study of Soviet nostalgia[31] have fostered broader reflections. Soviet nostalgia cannot be assimilated into nationalism; it is a much larger phenomenon whose roots reside in changes of habitus, cultural values, and norms,[32] and in fears of losing Soviet-era welfare benefits.[33] This illumination of social and cultural motivations has made it possible to de-ideologize "nationalism" by studying it in its social context – for instance, as a Bourdieusian *habitus* for the educated but pauperized middle-classes[34] – as well as in its cultural context (the success of patriotic blockbusters and TV series re-enacting Soviet classics).[35]

Russian scholars, more than Western ones, have done impressive work on all these societal and cultural transformations, and many international joint projects and dialog platforms have enriched the debate. If the institutions that work on nationalism within Russia itself (SOVA Center, Levada Center, Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, St. Petersburg Independent Center for Sociological Research, etc.) have limited their work or found themselves in difficult situations as a result of the political climate, an array of online journals – *Ab Imperio*, *Neprikosnovennyi zapas, Laboratorium, Pro i contra* (until it ceased to exist)*, Rossiia v global'nom mire, Forum noveishei vostochnoevropeiskoi istorii i kul'tury* – have created new spaces for debating these issues.

Over the course of the past few years, scholarly studies of "Russian nationalism" have been profoundly reinvigorated and entered into dialog with the social sciences, especially cultural studies and anthropology. This mode of "exiting the political" and "entering the social" is an ongoing effort: visual culture, for instance, is largely underexplored despite constituting a core element of what can be defined as ideational politics in today's Russia. All these new approaches will continue to enrich the interpretative grids of "Russian nationalism."

Russian nationalism studies today: context and directions

This short overview of the field leads to several conclusions. The list that follows is obviously simplified and open to criticism, but it summarizes the context of current research on "Russian nationalism" and its overarching directions.

First, the Western – and in particular US – field of Russian Studies has been deeply molded by the state of the US–Russia relationship. It has therefore had to contend with the deterioration of the bilateral relationship first in 2011–2012, followed by the 2014 Ukrainian crisis, and even more visibly with the current "Russiagate" uproar – Russia's alleged meddling in the November 2016 US presidential elections. Scholarly works face an uphill struggle to be heard in the cacophony of think-tank studies and news reports that overwhelmingly reproduce simplistic Cold War-inherited narratives and frames of analysis.[36] To advance their objective and non-partisan narratives on Russia, scholars are compelled to interact with the "noise" produced by the policy and media worlds while avoiding letting their analyses be hijacked by immediate policy interpretations.

The second conclusion, which follows from the first, is that in Western discourses, Russia's evolutions tend to be systematically interpreted in terms of what they mean for Russia's place on the international scene and its relationship with the West. This situation leads to myriad ideological shortcuts and analytical mistakes in deciphering everything happening within Russia as part of the country's foreign policy agenda. One such distortion is to think that fighting against Putin's authoritarianism and promoting a more democratic path for the country will automatically result in Moscow developing a pro-Western policy on the international scene, while foreign and domestic policy are, in fact, dissociated on that question. Even more important, this approach misses several "elephants in the room": that the regime speaks primarily to its domestic public opinion and that the Kremlin is not a pyramidal monolith obedient to an omniscient and omnipowerful Putin, but a conglomerate of diverse groups and institutions with largely decentralized voices and agendas, advancing by improvisation rather than by grand design.

The third is that the study of "Russian nationalism" is still marked by a prism of Russian exceptionality, one that was formulated by Russian thinkers in the eighteenth century and that Western scholars tend to have directly or indirectly reproduced since. More than a quarter of a century after the collapse of the Soviet Union, comparative studies are still rare: at the best they compare Russia with another post-Soviet state, but very little has been done to see Russia as a "normal" country and compare it with European states. We lack, for instance, comparative studies that set Russian nationalism/conservatism alongside Western or Central European nationalisms/conservatisms, or Russian patriotism and messianic tradition alongside US exceptionalism.[37] This has resulted in a large misreading of the current wave of illiberalism in Western Europe, Central Europe, and the United States, seen as a kind of byproduct of Putin's ideology. This avoids separating confluence from influence, denies the homegrown character of this illiberalism in the

"West" itself,[38] and refuses to see Russia as a country facing – admittedly with its own nuances and context – the same challenges and evolutions as the "West."

Fourth, priority has always been given to the ideological content of "Russian nationalism" over its social construction.[39] Works on this topic are mostly framed by schools of thought, which seek to determine the intellectual lineages of labels such as National Bolshevism, Eurasianism, Soviet patriotism, anti-Semitism, imperialism, and so on. But ideologies are fuzzy and shifting; they say nothing about the personal strategies, networks, and sociabilities of nationalist groups and leaders, nor about their positioning for or against the Kremlin. Moreover, most works continue to divide nationalist currents into two main trends: imperialist or ethno-nationalist.[40] This approach is outdated, as nationalist actors simultaneously deploy both imperialist and ethno-nationalist arguments. If one really wanted to categorize the broad doctrines of Russian nationalism, there are at least four mainstream sets, schematically represented in Table I.1. Yet such typologies by ideological content remain sterile if they are not combined with a more sociological approach to the strategy used by each group to speak to its constituency and secure its own niche in the political or cultural arena.

The fifth conclusion is that studies of "Russian nationalism" often aim to produce an easy, unidirectional mapping of where nationalism is and where it is not. Analysts look for a unique nationalist voice, and thus lose themselves in debating whether this comes from the Kremlin and shapes society or whether nationalist movements set the tone and the Kremlin adopts it – the classic dilemma of the chicken and the egg. Just as Soviet-era nationalism existed *underneath, against*, and *in* Soviet ideology and the Soviet administrative apparatus, there is no *birthplace* of "Russian nationalism" in contemporary Russia.

Statements classified as nationalist – a definition that obviously depends on the speaker's perspective – are expressed from multiple places and spaces because nationalism *is* polyphonic – that is, to each their own nationalism. There is a nationalism for the "losers" of post-Soviet reforms, who express themselves with protest votes for the Communist Party or Zhirinovsky's Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR); a nationalism for the political elites who backed United Russia's blending of Soviet nostalgia with post-Soviet

Table I.1 Four broad directions for Russian nationalism

Imperial nationalism (all CIS countries should reintegrate into Russia)
Eastern Slavic nationalism (eastern Ukraine, Belarus, possibly Transnistria, and northern Kazakhstan joining Russia)
Ethnic Russian nationalism (Russian Federation, possibly joined by Eastern Slavic countries/regions, but without the North Caucasus, and with a visa regime with Central Asia)
Rossiiskii nationalism (Russian Federation with a visa regime with Central Asia and the Caucasus and a specific status for ethnic Russians inside Russia, but with no support for Russian irredentism in the "near abroad")

consumerism and market-inspired ideology; a nationalism for the young lower classes who express themselves via skinhead violence; and – a relative newcomer – a nationalism for the urban middle classes, pro-European and democratic, but simultaneously xenophobic, a position expressed by the National Democrats and Navalny. The voices are therefore multiple and include a wide array of actors: from Kremlin-backed production, para-official voices such as the Moscow Patriarchate, and myriad institutions functioning under the state umbrella, to both conservative and liberal opposition, and to the regions and the republics, which have their own colors and tones of "nationalism."

Finally, and this is probably the most critical point, we tend to see "Russian nationalism" as expressed in the realm of politics and political ideologies.[41] By taking this perspective, we miss two key points. The first is that nationalism and its reservoirs of symbols are also expressed – and probably most successfully – in the intellectual, cultural, and communication worlds. Cinema, music, and sport are perhaps the best-known fields, but there are also urban projects, exhibition policies, performance and street art, painting and sculpture, photography, fashion and streetwear, animation, music and music videos, and advertisements and marketing. Second, by looking at nationalism as something radical or extreme, often synonymous with the far right, we circumvent the existence of "banal nationalism." Banal nationalism encompasses reified folk culture, everyday habits, and routines grounded in common sense: landscapes, body policies, and social norms (politeness, hospitality, etiquette), consumption practices, and culinary or leisure spending preferences.[42] Russia's *banal* nationalism and its articulation with *ideological* nationalism are still waiting for scholarly attention.

The book

In this book, I define nationalism as having both content and form. As content, nationalism is an ideology that promotes the interests of a particular nation. Interests can be defined in multiple ways. Among the most frequent ones are that the territory of the nation should correspond to a state and that the nation should govern itself and protect its "identity" – another term with multiple possible meanings. With such a definition, nationalism can include movements that contest the status quo by claiming that these two conditions are not met, on the one hand, and state initiatives that consolidate statehood by merging it with nationhood, on the other. In the case of Russia, these two trends exist in parallel, and do intersect on occasion.

In terms of form, nationalism can be a doctrine, a political movement calling for certain changes, or a state ideology. As a doctrine – that is, a corpus of texts with some inner logic and argumentative coherence – nationalism in Russia often took the form of debating the "Russian idea" (*russkaia ideia*). This term conventionally refers to the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century intellectual debates that centered on the idea that the essence of the Russian nation could be characterized by certain timeless features such as messianism, Orthodox

spirituality, and a sense of harmony or community (*sobornost'*). However, the concept of the Russian Idea has been gradually expanded to encompass all debates on national identity, extending from those among the first Slavophiles of the early 1830s to contemporary doctrines on how the nation can reassume its sense of mission. This realm of discussion is rooted in the tradition of *publitsistika*, or essayism, that may take the form of anything from poetry to journalism and political pamphlet and through which authors spread their vision of the world to a broader audience. In Tsarist Russia as well as in the Soviet Union, thick journals (*tolstye zhurnaly*) were one of the main venues that circulated *publitsistika*. The lack of a public, conventional freedom to express political ideas moved people toward the realm of culture as a space of innovation, making culture and politics closely intertwined. In today's Russia, *publitsistika* has acquired a new feature, that of market profitability: nationalist "ideological entrepreneurship" may then overlap with commercial strategies to produce bestsellers.[43]

As a political movement, nationalism claims something that it does not have but aims to acquire. It thus calls for change – either through democratic processes or revolutionary violence – and relies on ideological elements but primarily on its potential to mobilize people: it needs a societal niche to become a force for change. In the Russian case, the combination of doctrines and actions has been difficult to find, with the former predominating over the latter. Yet one can identify some societal niches and mechanisms for mobilization in the name of "Russian nationalism." Last but not least, nationalism can be a state-sponsored ideology. This often tends to be conflated with nationhood processes, an analytical mistake since every country undergoes nationhood processes without necessarily having a nationalist policy.

This book's approach is limited to studying nationalism as a doctrine and as a political movement. I see nationalism mostly as a grassroots trend – in the sense of not being directly sponsored by the state – and believe that the Russian state cannot be termed "nationalist." Yes, it aims to structure nationhood and its symbolic pantheon, plays on reservoirs of meaning of the nation, fosters regime legitimacy, and promotes Russia's great-powerness on the international scene, but the articulation between these elements does not make the Russian state "nationalist."

Obviously, "Russian nationalism" as a grassroots trend interacts with state narratives and state actors at many levels. It competes with them, innervates them, and may be influenced by them. It is simultaneously co-opted, manipulated, and repressed by state narratives and state actors. The interplay between Russia's nationhood process and nationalist mobilization potential has been shaping the country's ideological landscape. The authorities focus on building a resilient grand narrative that is consensual enough to be broadly supported by the population, skims over difficult moments that may polarize public opinion, and advances interpretative grids that support the regime's legitimacy and stability. Nationalist movements' ideological room for maneuver has declined dramatically since the 1990s, as topics previously part of their agenda have been

incorporated into the state discursive portfolio and thereby been "neutered." In this joint construction with bottom-up and top-down dynamics, the state has so far largely maintained control over the nationalists' mobilization potential. If one wants to capture the complexities of the interactions between nationalist actors and the state structure, here is a very schematic table describing at least four levels.

While state-sponsored nationhood offers impressive examples of creativity, plasticity, and inclusiveness, its ability to keep the balance in the coming years remains to be seen. Some influential actors, such as the Church, are pushing for more rigid narratives; xenophobia, weakened since the Ukrainian crisis, may reappear as a dividing line separating ethnic Russians, Russia's Muslims, and migrants. The younger generation, for the moment very pro-Putin, will probably develop a set of values that will challenge the status quo. Ideological polarization therefore has the potential to abruptly re-emerge and dramatically reshuffle the cards of Russia's contested identity.

To offer a comprehensive approach to this "Russian nationalism," I delve into three of its repertoires: nationalism as an imaginary of the nation; nationalism as

Table I.2 A schematic table of "Russian Nationalism" and its relationship to state structures

Full opposition nationalists	All those committing racist violence and/or referring to the Nazi repertoire and/or organizing street action against the regime. This includes a myriad of far-right structures, today largely disbanded (skinheads, DPNI, Russkie, Slavic Union, RONS, National Socialist Initiative, etc.) as well as Eduard Limonov's different structures (Natsboly/ Limonovtsy/Other Russia), and the National Democrats, including Alexei Navalny.
Mid-opposition nationalists	Pro-Novorossiya groups around, among others, Igor Strelkov, which may benefit from some support from the military or security services but get disbanded when they become too autonomous or radical.
Co-opted statist nationalists	Those who express "statist nationalist" sentiments in any of their myriad forms and are therefore seen as supporting the regime beyond their – mild – critique of it: Vladimir Zhirinovsky, Gennadi Ziuganov, Aleksandr Prokhanov, Aleksandr Dugin, Nikolai Starikov, Egor Kholmogorov, etc.
"Official" nationalists	The figures with a status inside the state apparatus who act as "brokers" between grassroots movements and state institutions: Deputy Prime Minister: Dmitri Rogozin Advisor to the President: Sergei Glaziev Several MPs: Sergei Baburin, Natalia Narochnitskaia, Aleksei Mitrofanov, Aleksandr Kurianovich, Evgenii Fiodorov, Natalia Poklonskaia, etc.

a doctrinal experiment; and nationalism as a battlefield on which state and non-state actors compete. These repertoires extend from the purely ideational field – the field of abstract ideas – to the more political realm, with clearly identified figures who promote specific agendas of power.

In Part I, I assert that nations do not exist without an imaginary realm and that, in the case of Russia, the nation's imaginary is of an imperial nature. Whether we consider the Soviet Union to have been an empire or not, its collapse has made it a *post-mortem* emblem of a defunct world that is, implicitly or explicitly, associated with a form of empire – the former territory was larger than that of the country today. Because the empire ceases to exist, it can only be recreated in a discursive world, by elaborating doctrines that re-invent a virtual, alternate Russia.

The nation's imaginary thus relies on the "coding" of three different imperial features: geography, history, and space-religion. The imperial reference implies that territorial expansion (the geographical feature) is critical to justifying the country's political relevance. Since the Roman Empire remains the archetypal empire, the imperial reference also calls for an authenticity that can be traced to the ancient past, if possible a Mediterranean past (the historical feature). In addition, empires are often based on religious legitimacy – for Russia, Orthodoxy and its claim of being the Third Rome. Yet during the atheist Soviet regime, the Orthodox perception of the cosmos as God's space blended with a technological utopia that saw the conquest of space as intimately linked with Russia's territory and religiosity (the spatial-religious feature). In all three cases, this rich imperial imaginary provides a form of symbolic revenge over post-Soviet politics, its traumas, humiliations, and misunderstandings.

In Part II, I explore nationalism as a doctrine, i.e., an attempt to elaborate a set of principles organized into a more or less coherent whole. Russia has faced many ideological experiments advanced by several figures or groups, yet only a few exhibit some theoretical "substance." I see three main repertoires that have reshaped the post-Soviet nationalist landscape in a more or less profound way. The first is Russia's Aryanness and its religious corollary, neo-paganism, which in a sense modifies an old Slavophile theme to bring it more into line with modern ideological references and allows for the development of a feeling of shared destiny with Europe and sometimes the West more globally, moving beyond geopolitical opposition to the latter. The second is the multilayered repertoire advanced by Aleksandr Dugin around his multiple attempts to rehabilitate fascism as compatible with modern Russia and its Eurasianist destiny – here the core concept is that of the Conservative Revolution, which partly resonates with the Putin regime's conservative values agenda. The third has been the Izborskii Club's effort to forge a "Putinian" doctrinal synthesis of conservative values, anti-Westernism, and Red-and-White reconciliation with the – failed – hope of nurturing a more doctrinal turn on the part of the Presidential Administration.

In Part III, I read nationalism as a political battlefield with several competing actors. It belongs not only to the realm of ideas, but also to those of action and social mobilization. Nationalism can serve all purposes: it can ally with

democratic forces as well as with authoritarian ones; it can be liberal as well as illiberal; it can consolidate the regime by offering it a consensual ideology, or it can challenge and try to overthrow the ruling elites. As a political battlefield, nationalism needs not only ideas, thinkers, funders and patrons, but also grassroots-level actors. These are quite marginal and do not constitute a large share of the population. Yet they do not need to be numerous to have an impact.

The relationship between Russian national*ists* – actors, not ideologies – and the Russian state is an ambivalent one, made of several interplays: competition, co-optation, mutual borrowing, delegitimation, and repression. For state structures, the main challenge is to find the right equilibrium, engaging Russian nationalism's social mobilization potential without being ideologically bypassed by it. In this third part, I discuss the three main "doers" of Russian nationalism and their interplay with state structures: the classic far-right groups, which offer a combination of references going from Italian fascism's "black shirts" to US "White Power"; the newest trend of National Democrats, embodied by Putin's prominent opponent Alexei Navalny, who supports a European-inspired populist ethnonationalism; and the resurgent militia groups, comprised of volunteer fighters dreaming about Russia's territorial expansion in "Novorossiya."

Notes

1 Those publishers have kindly authorized their republication here.
2 I am very grateful to Henry Hale, Charles Sullivan, and Julian Waller for their previous comments on parts of this introduction.
3 See Wayne Dowler, *Dostoïevski, Grigoriev and Native Soil Conservatism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982); Linda Gerstein, *Nikolay Strakhov: Philosopher, Man of Letters, Social Critic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971); Stephen Lukashevich, *Konstantin Leontev: A Study in Russian "Heroic Vitalism"* (New York: Pageant Press, 1967); Stephen Lukashevich, *N.F. Fiodorov: A Study in Russian Eupsychian and Utopian Thought* (Newark, NJ: University of Delaware Press, 1977).
4 See John B. Dunlop, *The Faces of Contemporary Russian Nationalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983); John B. Dunlop, *The New Russian Nationalism* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1985); John B. Dunlop, *The New Russian Revolutionaries* (Belmont, MA: Nordland Publishing Company, 1976); John B. Dunlop, *The Rise of Russia and the Fall of the Soviet Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993). See also Aleksandr Yanov, *The Russian Challenge and the Year 2000* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987); Aleksandr Yanov, *The Russian New Right: Right-Wing Ideologies in the Contemporary USSR* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978); as well as Walter Laqueur, *Black Hundred: The Rise of the Extreme Right in Russia* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993).
5 See Yitzhak M. Brudny, *Reinventing Russia: Russian Nationalism and the Soviet State, 1953–1991* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2000). See also Kathleen Parthé, *Russian Village Prose: The Radiant Past* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).
6 Even if the Soviet Union was comprised of 15 theoretically equal republics, the RSFSR was devoid of some institutions: there were only 14 republican-level institutions and one pan-Soviet one, underlying the specific status of Russia as being more the center of the Union than an equal among other republics. For the non-Russian elite, it was a sign of the Soviet Union continuing the Russian colonial domination,

and for Russian nationalists a sign of Russia being "dissolved" by the Soviet regime in favor of other republics. See Nikolai Mitrokhin, *"Russkaia partiia": dvizhenie russkikh natsionalistov v SSSR 1953–1985 gg*. (Moscow: NLO, 2003).

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8 On Pamiat, see William Korey, *Russian Antisemitism, Pamyat and the Demonology of Zionism* (Chur: Harwood Academic Publishers for the Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1995). See also Viacheslav Likhachev, *Political Anti-Semitism in Post-Soviet Russia: Actors and Ideas in 1991–2003* (Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag, 2006).

9 See Stephen D. Shenfield, *Russian Fascism: Traditions, Tendencies, Movements* (New York and London: M.E. Sharpe, 2001); Semyon Reznik, *The Nazification of Russia: Antisemitism in the Post-Soviet Era* (Washington DC: Challenge Publications, 1996); Thomas Parland, *The Extreme Nationalist Threat in Russia: The Growing Influence of Western Rightist Ideas* (London and New York: Routledge-Curzon, 2004); Vadim Rossman, *Russian Intellectual Antisemitism in the Post-Communist Era* (Lincoln, NE and London: University of Nebraska Press for the Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2002).

10 On this topic, see the debates that took place in *Post-Soviet Affairs* between Stephen E. Hanson, Jeffrey S. Kopstein, and Stephen Shenfield: Stephen E. Hanson and Jeffrey S. Kopstein, "The Weimar/Russia Comparison," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 13, no. 3 (1997): 252–283; Stephen Shenfield, "The Weimar/Russia Comparison: Reflections on Hanson and Kopstein," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 14, no. 4 (1998): 355–368; Stephen E. Hanson and Jeffrey S. Kopstein, "Paths to Uncivil Societies and Anti-Liberal States: A Reply to Shenfield," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 14, no. 4 (1998): 369–375.

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12 Among many others, see Vicken Cheterian, *You're Listening to a Sample of the Audible Audio Edition. War and Peace in the Caucasus: Russia's Troubled Frontier* (London: Hurst, 2009); Viktor Shnirel'man, *Byt' Alanami. Intellektualy i politika na Severnom Kavkaze v XX vek* (Moscow: NLO, 2006); Thomas de Waal, *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War* (New York: NYU Press, 2013 [2003]).

13 David Laitin, *Identity in Formation: The Russian-Speaking Populations in the New Abroad* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998) (see also many of his articles on the Baltic case); Pål Kolstø, ed., *Nation-Building and Ethnic Integration in Post-Soviet Societies: An Investigation of Latvia and Kazakhstan* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999); Pål Kolstø, *Political Construction Sites: Nation Building in Russia and the Post-Soviet States* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000). See also Alan Ingram, "A Nation Split into Fragments: The Congress of Russian Communities and Russian Nationalist Ideology," *Europe-Asia Studies* 51, no. 4 (1999): 687–704.

14 Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

15 Fiona Hill, "In Search of Great Russia: Elites, Ideas, Power, the State, and the Pre-Revolutionary Past in the New Russia, 1991–1996" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1998).

16 Read, among others, Andrew Wilson, *Virtual Politics: Faking Democracy in the Post-Soviet World.* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005); Henry E. Hale, *Why Not Parties in Russia? Democracy, Federalism, and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge

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25 See the SOVA series edited by Alexander Verkhovskii: *Demokratiia vertikali* (Moscow: SOVA, 2006), *Russkii natsionalizm: Ideologiia i nastroenie* (Moscow: SOVA, 2006); *Tsena nenavisti. Natsionalizm v Rossii i protivodeistvie rasistskim predstupleniiam* (Moscow: SOVA, 2005); *Putiami nesvobody* (Moscow: SOVA, 2005); and (with Galina Kozhevnikova), *Radikal'nyi russkii natsionalizm. Struktury, idei, lista* (Moscow: SOVA, 2009). See also Viktor Shnirel'man, *Intellektual'nye labirinty: ocherki ideologii v sovremennoi Rossii* (Moscow: Academia, 2004); Viktor Shnirel'man, "*Chistil'shchiki moskovskikh ulits." Skinkhedy, SMI i obshchestvennoe mnenie* (Moscow: Academia, 2007); Konstantin Sheiko, in collaboration with Stephen Brown, *Nationalist Imaginings on the Russian Past: Anatolii Fomenko and the Rise of Alternative History in Post-Communist Russia* (Stuttgart: Ibidem- Verlag, 2009); Viacheslav Likhachev and Vladimir Pribylovsky, *Russkoe natsional'noe edintsvo 1990–2000* (Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag, 2005); and Jardar Østbø and Pål Kolstø, *The New Third Rome: Readings of a Russian Nationalist Myth* (Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag, 2016).

26 With some exceptions such as Richard Arnold, "Systematic Racist Violence in Russia Between 'Hate Crime' and 'Ethnic Conflict,'" *Theoretical Criminology* 19, no. 2 (2015): 239–256.

27 See, for instance, Hilary Pilkington, Elena Omel'chenko, and Al'bina Garifzianova, *Russia's Skinheads: Exploring and Rethinking Subcultural Lives* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010). See also Elena Omel'chenko, "Antifa protiv Fa. O terminakh i ne tol'ko," *Polit.ru*, May 24, 2010, http://polit.ru/article/2010/05/24/antifa/; and Olga Aksiutina, *Pank virus v Rossii* (Moscow: LEAN, 1999).
28 Valerie Sperling, "Nashi Devushki: Gender and Political Youth Activism in Putin's and Medvedev's Russia," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 28, no. 2 (2012): 232–261; and Julie Hemment's current research on women in youth patriotic movements.
29 See, for instance, the works presented during the conference "National Identity in Eurasia II: Migrancy & Diaspora," *Wolfson College, University of Oxford*, July 10–12, 2009, www.mod-langs.ox.ac.uk/russian/nationalism/migrancyconf.htm. On the second topic, see Gerard Toal, *Near Abroad: Putin, the West and the Contest over Ukraine and the Caucasus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).
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31 See, for instance, the "Memory at War" project, which investigates the cultural dynamics of the "memory wars" currently raging in Poland, Russia, and Ukraine, at www.memoryatwar.org/.
32 See, for instance, Marlene Laruelle, *In the Name of the Nation: Nationalism and Politics in Contemporary Russia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Maria Lipman, "The Kremlin Turns Ideological: Where This New Direction Could Lead," in *Russia 2025. Scenarios for the Russian Future*, eds. Maria Lipman and Nikolai Petrov (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 220–239.
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36 See Andrei Tsygankov, *Russophobia: Anti-Russian Lobby and American Foreign Policy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).
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38 Marlene Laruelle, "Russian and American Far Right Connections: Confluence, Not Influence," *PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo* 516 (March 2018), www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/russian-and-American-far-right-connections-confluence-not-influence;
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41 See Pål Kolstø and Helge Blakkisrud, eds., *The New Russian Nationalism: Imperialism, Ethnicity and Authoritarianism, 2000–15* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018); Pål Kolstø and Helge Blakkisrud, eds., *Russia before and after Crimea: Nationalism and Identity, 2010–2017* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018).
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Part I

Nationalism as imperial imaginary

Cosmos, geography, and ancient past

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1 Cosmism

Russian messianism at a time of technological modernity[1]

The core doctrines shaping Russian nationalism, such as Slavophilism and Pan-Slavism, have been well studied. Yet another school of thought, fundamental to understanding today's ideological framing, has attracted less scholarly attention: Cosmism. Cosmism is rooted in the Romantic and organicist tradition that rejects divisions of knowledge, assumes that scientific progress and spiritual quest go hand-in-hand, and believes in an intrinsic link between micro- and macrocosms. Cosmism's main ramifications date from the 1920s, when the Bolshevik Revolution blended occult traditions and sciences of the future. It gave a new lease of life to a secular millenarism that was founded on ancient utopian traditions present in Orthodoxy. God-building, bioCosmism, theories of rejuvenation with blood (Bogdanov), Lenin's unique embalming method – all constituted part of this spiritual-utopian kaleidoscope that the Revolution had awakened.[2] These universalist utopias emerged in the early 1920s, but were eliminated during the Great Turn of 1929. Stalinism no longer wanted to hear dreams about humanity's potentialities; it wanted to change nature and society by force. It was no longer committed to a transformation of humanity as a whole, but sought to prove the superiority of Russian-Soviet science in its competition with the capitalist world.

Yet, as a maximalist ideology par excellence, Cosmism was the only futurist trend of the early 1920s to survive the Great Turn. Its totalitarian features and the importance it assigned to technological modernity were in agreement with the ambitions of "total realization" that were operative both in the Bolshevik years and under Stalin. Cosmism was thus able to find some common ground with Stalinism, permitting the latter to instrumentalize it as part of the victory of Soviet science. Later, it found common ground with Khrushchevian *détente* over the conquest of space.[3] Like the United States, the Soviet Union transposed its religious and political messianism into creating a space utopia, legitimated by scientific progress and the advance of flight technologies.[4] Cosmism therefore managed to navigate the troubled waters of the informal Soviet world: it was neither reduced to an instrument of state propaganda nor openly dissident, and found its niche in the various spaces of intellectual freedom permitted in Soviet society. Since then, it has constituted a critical cornerstone of post-Soviet nationalist repertoires.

The genesis of Cosmist thinking: a contextualization

Cosmism drew many of its philosophical precepts from the great currents of thought preceding it and tried to put forward an original and innovative synthesis of the relations between science and faith. It is rooted in the Romantic ideology of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and organicist theories that assume the existence of laws of harmony among humankind, nature, and the cosmos. It also drew inspiration from the scientism of the turn of the twentieth century and the nomogenetic precepts used to challenge Darwinism. Lastly, Cosmism is inspired by the messianic statements of Soloviev and Dostoevskii concerning the reconciliation of humanity over and above its division into different nations.

Rooted in the German *Naturphilosophie* elaborated from the end of the eighteenth century, Romantic ideology appeals to a new model of intelligibility in which primacy is given to the human factor. It asserts that human beings retain their essential singularity, are irreducible to numerical analysis, and that science goes hand-in-hand with faith: the organization of phenomena is explicable by recourse to providence. Hence, Romantic ideology does not challenge the facts and laws established by experimental research, but rather their placement in the general scheme of knowledge. Though it accepts the encyclopaedic knowledge of the Renaissance, it dismisses that of the Enlightenment, which it apprehends as a collection of unrelated pieces of knowledge that reject faith. Romanticism aims, in fact, to restore a lost unity by endorsing a science that is total and transdisciplinary. It endorses a return to a philosophy that recognizes the rights of imagination and emotion.

For the Romantics, the value of an event appeared only when it was placed in a meaningful context. As such, they maintained the necessity of constructing a higher level of knowledge, a philosophy of humanity that encompassed both faith and science.[5] This Romantic thinking was strongly marked by the birth of a general theory of biology that made flora and fauna part of the same processes as humans. Nature was no longer considered a mythological divinity but an internal economy subject to logics that humans could understand. Accordingly, *Lebenskraft* (vital force) became the major scientific theme of the era. Not by chance did *Naturphilosophie* have great success in both the medical milieus and the fields of Earth science and botany. The mechanicist revolution had assured the triumph of an analytic representation of the universe. However, as machines have no self-awareness, the mind that creates them must be of another order. Organicism thus sought to reestablish a previously dominant mode of knowledge, wherein instead of placing limits on its ambitions to decipher the superficial organization of phenomena, it strove to forge an alliance with the "essence" of reality. For the artificial construction of mechanicism, it substituted a living growth that obeyed not abstract rules but an immanent inspiration. Organicism established the possibility of understanding the world on the principle of analogy. It proposed a vitalist schema of growth whose dynamism progresses from birth to death, and which maintains, between the elements that it assembles, an intimate solidarity, in

which mechanisms are subordinated to the government of finality: the part cannot be realized without the whole, or the whole without the parts. Multiplicity and unity do not stand in contradiction.[6]

While Romanticism had wanted to "put [Isaac] Newton on trial"[7] and asserted that a mechanistic and clockwork-like vision of the human automaton would lead straight to an industrial hell, Cosmism affirmed exactly the opposite. In so doing, it drew on the scientific revival of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This revival rejected positivism, interpreted as a resignation of the mind, which considers that science has no say in the inner meaning of the phenomena whose sequences it sketches. But for the scientists, science aimed to provide the response to the great questions – religious and moral – of humanity, those to which religion also responds. As Jules de Gaultier explained in 1911:

> scientist belief repeats the sum of petitions comprising the program of human hope in its messianic and moral forms. It restores the theme of the always reborn and unfulfilled dream of human consciousness on the search for better futures among the perspectives on a development that is inestimable in duration.[8]

Cosmism is based wholly on this scientific precept, which it pushes to the extreme. It can therefore be understood as a vitalist theory indirectly inspired by Bergsonian thought. Already convinced, thanks to its organicist influences, about rehabilitating the alchemy of the Renaissance, Cosmism also drew inspiration from the parascientific quests of its time, such as spiritism, hypnotism, somnambulism and telepathy, the discovery of so-called animal magnetism (mesmerism), palingenesis, and metempsychosis. All these challenges to the limits of science encouraged the belief that there are some parts of scientific knowledge still inaccessible to the human mind. The discovery of the atom, the gene, and the idea according to which every living cell registers and reacts to natural phenomena came to profoundly influence Cosmism.

Cosmism also appropriated some Russian intellectual traditions. In the second half of the nineteenth century, several thinkers, stimulated by Darwinism, set out to investigate the relations between science and faith, as well as the epistemology of science.[9] The embryologist Karl Ernst von Baer (1792–1876), whose theories were very popular in Europe, objected, for example, to the idea that natural selection suffices to explain evolution. Anticipating the theory of mutations that Hugo de Vries (1848–1935) would later develop, Baer subscribed to immanentism and was a supporter of so-called ontogenetic evolution, an approach conceived as fulfilling a plan.

Similar notions can be found in the work of the famous pan-Slavist theoretician Nikolai Danilevskii (1822–1885). In his *Darwinism: A Critical Study (Darvinizm. Kriticheskoe issledovanie)*, published in two volumes in 1885 and 1889, he postulated that Darwinism was not a matter of botany or zoology, but a philosophical interrogation into the origin of humanity and the organicity (*tselesoobraznost'*) of nature. He therefore acknowledged a positivist point in Darwin's

theory, which is that it puts the naturalist back into nature insofar as it proves the need to study forms of life in their environment and not to wait until they are extinct to classify them: their harmony must be explained rather than each living thing taken individually.[10] Nevertheless, for Danilevskii, the idea of systematizing chance in the mechanisms of evolution amounted to a negation of the existence of God: how, from a series of chance events without any coordination among them, could a harmonious order emerge? If humans are only descendants of the ape, then nihilist and atheist thinking is justified: Danilevskii judged the idea of the struggle for survival, in which only the strongest survive, eminently anti-Christian. Here, he followed the German Theodor Eimer (1843–1898), who promoted the idea of inner predetermined evolution – an idea ignored by Darwin, who privileged external causality.[11]

In the early twentieth century, Lev Berg (1876–1950) pursued Baer's and Danilevskii's claims that there existed an alternative nomogenesis to Darwinism in his work *Nomogenesis* (1922).[12] His nomogenetic theory of evolution postulates that evolution obeys laws; for example, that it is a development of preexisting rudiments or potentialities, rather than a series of adaptive responses by organisms to their environment. Berg, however, rejected all vitalist approaches. For him, conformity to a goal was a property of the living and not a mysterious force. Along the same lines, Boris Chicherin (1828–1904), anticipating Bergson, spoke of an inner, goal-oriented vital force and believed that the only explanatory principle of evolution was teleology.[13] Similar approaches also emerged with Vladimir Vernadskii, whom we will discuss in the next chapter.

Last but not least, Cosmism can also be considered a product of the Silver Age and the revival of Russian philosophy embodied by Semen Frank (1877–1950), Nikolai Berdiaev (1874–1948), Nikolai Grot (1852–1899), Pavel Florenskii (1882–1937), Sergei Trubetskoi (1862–1905), and Lev Karsavin (1882–1952). The philosophers of the Russian Silver Age pursued the Romantic will for synthetic knowledge in order to give meaning to the world. They wanted philosophical reflection to be meta-systematic and to provide essential responses to their interrogations. They saw the much-awaited realization of the union among science, faith, and poetry in a renewed philosophy. The Cosmists are particularly indebted to Vladimir Soloviev,[14] who himself had borrowed the notion of "integral knowledge" (*tsel'noe znanie*) from Ivan Kireevskii (1806–1846) and had been influenced by his combination of mystical intuitions and interest in the "Russian question." Soloviev's philosophy lies at the intersection of the three approaches that, according to him, set humanity on the path to wisdom: theosophy (thought), theurgy (emotion, art), and theocracy (will). The philosopher believed that only Orthodoxy could imbue this new philosophy with Christian principles, with the task of re-establishing the unity of the intelligible world. Nevertheless, Byzantium had moved away from the real Christian spirit and only adhered to rituals, not spiritual content, and the Russian Church since Patriarch Nikon (1605–1681) had become corrupt and too secular. Orthodoxy could therefore be revived only by reunion with Rome, which had preserved the notion of a central authority. Soloviev's philosophy thus placed the concept of all-unity

(*vseedinstvo*) at the core of its reflections: it framed the much-awaited ecumenical synthesis as a step toward the intrinsic reunification of humanity and the universe.

To Soloviev's concept of totality it is necessary to add other messianic precepts, such as those developed by Fiodor Dostoevskii (1821–1881), notably in his *Journal of a Writer* (*Dnevnik pisatelia*) published between 1873 and 1881. Dostoevskii remained a Christian thinker who was more interested in faith and evil than in the future of Russia alone. His messianism, however, is ambiguous, being at once religious and national. He thought that the Russians had been called upon to save the world because they were the body of Christ, the people of freedom and of social justice: "We Russians have two homelands: Russia and Europe – even in cases when we call ourselves Slavophiles. (…) The greatest of all the great missions that the Russians realize lies ahead of them is the common human mission."[15] Accordingly, Russian messianism is also universal in its biblical filiation:

> Europe is almost as dear to all of us as is Russia: Europe is the home of the whole tribe of Japheth, and our idea is the unification of all the nations of this tribe and, eventually, in the distant future, of the tribes of Shem and Ham as well.[16]

This Russian messianism is often adorned with eschatological characteristics. The prevailing theme of the imminent end of the world – or massive upheavals – is traditional in Russian popular thinking, for instance in the famous legend of the submerged town of Kitezh and the Old Believers who wandered as far as Siberia and Chinese Turkestan.[17]

From these multiple influences, Cosmism tries to forge a reconciliatory synthesis of opposites.[18] In their own way, its main theoreticians militate for the rebirth of holistic knowledge – in the manner desired by Romanticism, but without subscribing to the idea of humanity's decadence. From organicism, they retain the claim about the ontological unity between man and nature, as well as the need to converge the forms of knowledge of man and the cosmos. Like the anti-Darwinian Romantic biologists, they believe that the evolution of life is based not on the idea of random selection, but on a predestined nomogenetic design that remains to be discovered. However, Cosmism never undermines science itself. On the contrary, it is fundamentally optimistic, futurist, and convinced of humanity's potential to progress through science. Cosmists are part of the great currents of messianism to have developed in Russia: they believe that, one way or another, their country is destined to accomplish a reconciliation of humanity.

The founding fathers: from Christian exegesis to the conquest of space

A great herald of the Cosmist movement, Nikolai Fiodorov (1828–1903), was an original, if marginal, figure in Russia at the start of the twentieth century.[19] A

librarian based at the Rumiantsev Museum in Moscow, he refused to publish while he was alive and only spoke of his philosophical ideas to small groups of loyal supporters.[20] His sole work, *Philosophy of the Common Task* (*Filosofiia obshchego dela*), was published posthumously by his two disciples, Nikolai Peterson and Vladimir Kozhevnikov.[21] This long and complex work can be understood as a scientific exegesis of Christianity, heavily inspired by Soloviev and Dostoevskii. Fiodorovism maintains that there is only one real goal of humanity: the resurrection of the dead. All of humanity's intellectual, spiritual, and scientific activity is directed, consciously or not, toward this accomplishment. Death is held to be only one state of humanity, which arises from our imperfect character, and is by no means a destiny. This quest for immortality and for liberation from suffering, Fiodorovism maintains, will be achieved through faith, but also through technological knowledge. This first Cosmism, or Fiodorovism, is thus conceived as a practical and technological implementation of Christianity, construed primarily as a religion of resurrection. Created in the image of God, man must learn to resurrect that which is dead. The living have a moral duty to the dead to consciously restore all our ancestors. For Fiodorov, the conquest of space is intrinsically linked to the resurrection of the dead:

> [The] conquest of the path to space is an absolute imperative, imposed on us as a duty in preparation for the Resurrection. We must take possession of new regions of space because there is not enough space on Earth to allow the co-existence of all the resurrected generations.[22]

In this view, death does not destroy humanity. It simply transforms a human's corporeal state; bodies are deconstructed into atoms. With the conquest of the Moon, the planets, and the stars, humanity will be able to recover and reconstitute these sets of particles and begin the vast undertaking of reconstituting its ancestors' bodies, albeit perhaps in different physical forms. In its last stage, humanity will therefore be omniscient. Not limited in time or space, mankind will simultaneously be one and plural (*mnogoedinstvo*), thus resolving the contradiction between the individual and the collective. Fiodorov tried to formulate some preliminary technical means for the conquest of space and the mastery of nature. He believed strongly, for example, in gaining control of atmospheric processes and in the colonization of other planets (as a Malthusian, he was concerned about the growing demographic pressures exerted on the Earth), and he wrote about humankind's genetic transformations. However, these topics elicited strong distrust even among those who shared his philosophical and religious convictions.

Inspired by the utopian socialism of Fourier, Saint-Simon, and Bellamy, Fiodorov appealed to an immanent universal resurrection. Such a resurrection, he claimed, would by no means be reserved for a small circle of the elect, since there are no privileges in accessing higher knowledge: ideal reality is accessible only through pan-human labor, consciously organized. However, humanity's victory over nature, he argued, remained inextricably linked to Russia, since it

would lead the world on the path to salvation. Russia would be the key country to produce great advances in terms of mastery of the cosmos, interplanetary travel, transforming nature and climates, and establishing agriculture in space. Fiodorov also believed that the nature of Russia's ideocratic political regime was a further sign that heralded the resurrection of humanity. Only autocracy, which tends toward the completion of man, but also toward the worship of ancestors, constitutes the apogee of a people's maturity faced with capitalism and constitutionalism, which are deemed immature insofar as they proclaim that sons are superior to their fathers. Fiodorov claimed that the territorial success of the Russian Empire, its immense, unchallenged expansion into Asia, foreshadowed its destiny to conquer spaces of another nature, those of the cosmos.[23]

Fiodorov's world history is founded on a dialectical principle between civilizations that exploit the Earth, on the one hand, and nomad and mercantile civilizations, on the other. Russia plays a major role in this version of world history, since the *obshchina* (the commune) embodies the principle of the Earth – the only regenerator able to contend with the commerce and luxury that will lead to humanity's downfall. The tradition of the peasant commune has prepared the Russian people for the cosmic control of nature. It is also destined to help all major agricultural civilizations, particularly Indian and Chinese, become aware of their salvational role in countering the world of the steppe. The Russian autocracy will bring about the sedentarization of the nomads, as well as channel urban dwellers to the countryside; indeed, as a disciple of the first socialist utopians, Fiodorov hoped that all people would live in fields in the summer and in small factories during the winter.

Fiodorov also assigned major importance to the army, in which he saw the ideal of a collective humanity working to master nature. Russia's Christian army (*khristoliubivoe voisko*) would provide protection to any peoples that asked for it, resting on a twin mission: anti-colonialist, since Russia took up the defense of exploited peoples against the colonizing West, but also messianic, since it is compelled to work for world peace between the "white" and "yellow" races. In this fight, China is seen as one of Russia's main allies: through this alliance, a renewed Orthodoxy would introduce the ancestor worship present in Confucianism, something of which Fiodorov was especially appreciative, since ancestors and God were, for him, synonymous.[24] Since he hoped that, in the long term, the Middle Kingdom would convert to Christianity, he was delighted at the discoveries of Nestorian steles in Chinese Turkestan. For him, this proved that Orthodoxy – which the majority of contemporary Russian intellectuals equated to Nestorianism – was not foreign to China, but had once been its national religion.[25]

Despite his ambiguous attraction to China, Fiodorov's main focus was actually India. In 1899, he went to Turkestan from Krasnovodsk, the departure point of the Trans-Caspian Railway, and visited the Pamir Mountains (in present-day Tajikistan), which the Tsarist Empire then shared with the British Empire as part of an agreement that gave rise to the buffer state of Afghanistan in 1895. The Pamirs heightened his interest in the Indian question and came to have a fundamental place in his cosmogony: even if Constantinople embodied Christianity,

the Pamirs symbolized the birth of the Aryan race and the first steps of the Indo-European languages. According to Fiodorov, it was no coincidence that the Russian–British border had stabilized in the Pamirs, since it contained "the forgotten ancestors of all the Aryan and non-Aryan peoples, Japhet, Shem and Ham."[26] The Pamirs thus showed that the two colonial powers had a common origin and that this called for peace: should they prefer to make war here, he claimed, then the "cradle of the human species will also be its tomb."[27] The desire for a Russo-Indian alliance, however, was not directed against the West. On the contrary, Fiodorov was persuaded that a future rapprochement would occur between Germany and Russia, since, he alleged, the two peoples shared the common roots of "all peoples of Aryan origin."[28] Nature itself would call for the presence of the Tsarist Empire in India: the Russian rivers needed an opening to the southern seas and one could even foresee an "exchange of air" between the Siberian cold and the Indian monsoon, enabling the creation of a temperate climate in both countries.[29]

As the first step toward the reconciliation of humanity, Fiodorov proposed organizing a Russian–British scientific expedition – a form of Aryan pilgrimage – to search for the origins of humanity on the high summits of the Pamirs.[30] Once found, this "first Aryan" would then be brought back and buried in a "museum of the human species" to be located in Moscow, which would again become the capital of Russia and would take its place as the world center of awareness of the paternity – and therefore the fraternity – of Aryan humanity. Paying respect to the original Aryan remains would bring about global salvation, since "the discovery of the bones of the ancestors of all peoples must work towards a goal of pacification, of unification."[31]

By organizing a world conference of linguists in order to recreate humanity's original language as it existed prior to the division of Babel, Russia would announce a sort of eschatological return of humanity to itself and the much-awaited "end of history." National divisions would disappear and schools would be set up where the entirety of world knowledge would be taught. Fiodorov thus sketched future society as a form of totalitarian psychocracy, in which the idea of "returning to the Earth" is combined with that of a science-fiction world resembling Fourier's phalanstère but under the patronage of an Orthodox "Big Brother."[32] Fiodorov's thought had its main success after a Bolshevik Revolution that many intellectuals saw as the second coming of Christ, a transformation that implied not only social, but also metaphysical changes. However, after him, the theme of overcoming death was understood less as a religious phenomenon linked to a Christian awareness of the world and more as a mechanical reality. In the first years of the new Soviet regime, the main theoreticians of Cosmism merely advocated a more technical and practical vision of what had originally been deployed as a religious philosophy.

Among émigrés, Fiodorov's thought gave rise to a movement, centered around Nikolai Setnitskii (1888–1937), that laid claim to him in Harbin, Manchuria, and which played a key role in the crystallization of National Bolshevism by Nikolai Ustrialov (1890–1937), as well as in so-called leftist Eurasianism, the

views of which were expressed in the *Evraziia* newspaper, published in Clamart, near Paris, in the late 1920s.[33] Led by Aleksandr Gorskii (1886–1943), Fiodorov's disciples, the so-called *Fiodorovtsy*, were also organized in the Soviet Union, particularly in Moscow and Kaluga. At the time, they focused chiefly on the technical elements that Fiodorov had invoked in the struggle against humankind's mortality, rather than on his Christian philosophy, which no longer suited the ideological presuppositions of Bolshevik Russia. According to them, the cosmos is a machine, certainly one of extreme complexity, but nonetheless one that can be correctly deciphered to find the reverse process that will enable the passage from disaggregation to recomposition. Many groups that were stamped by revolutionary eschatology were particularly fascinated by the Fiodorovian metaphysics of technology, including the famous god-building movement (*bogostroiteli*) of Anatolii Lunacharskii (1875–1933) and Aleksandr Bogdanov (1873–1928), lesser-known groups of bioCosmists and immortalists,[34] and even central personalities of Soviet history, such as Leon Trotsky (1879–1940) and Maxim Gorky (1868–1936).

Depending on how strict one's definition of Cosmism is, it is possible to present Fiodorov either as the founding father of Cosmism or of his namesake movement, Fiodorovism. The latter approach leaves the paternity of Cosmism per se to Konstantin Tsiolkovskii (1857–1935).[35] A professor of mathematics and physics in Kaluga, Tsiolkovskii published in very small print runs and was a relatively marginal scientist for most of his lifetime in Tsarist Russia. But he was quickly embraced by the Soviet regime.[36] In 1921, Lenin personally awarded him a pension for life; he was also awarded the Order of the Red Banner. For his seventy-fifth birthday in 1932, Gorky, who had read many of his brochures and held him in very high esteem, championed him as that "interplanetary old man."[37] His real recognition came a few months before his death: in 1935, standing at Stalin's side in the Red Square reviewing stand that overlooked the Lenin mausoleum, Tsiolkovskii read a triumphant speech on the future of spatial conquest that was broadcast throughout the Soviet Union.[38] At a time when the Communist Party was looking to assert the superiority of Soviet science over its Western counterpart, Tsiolkovskii's innovative works were presented as infallible evidence of future Soviet success. The years of spatial conquest under Khrushchev transformed him posthumously into a Soviet hero, and today the University of Kaluga bears his name. In 2008, when a televised broadcast called "The Name of Russia" (*Imia Rossii*) drew up a list of the 50 figures from Russian history who most embodied the nation, Tsiolkovskii received more than 500,000 votes.[39]

Tsiolkovskii began his research in physics in the 1870s, and his first article, published in 1879, dealt with the solar system. At the start of the twentieth century, he devoted himself to a series of articles in which he examined the various technical possibilities of sending objects into space. Subsequently, he became the first scientist, at least in Russia, to produce mathematical proofs on space flight by demonstrating the possibility of controlled motion of an artificial vehicle in free space with the help of reactive jets. In *The Investigation of Space*

by Means of Reactive Devices (*Issledovanie mirovykh prostranstv reaktivmymi priboram*) (1903, 1911–1912), he published the basic equation for reaching space by rocket, an equation that is now known as the Tsiolkovsky Equation.[40] He reworked this topic in his principal scientific work, *Spatial Rockets* (*Kosmicheskie raketnye poezda*), published in 1929. His *Plan of Space Conquest* (*Plan zavoevaniia kosmosa*), dated from 1926, dealt with the manned colonization of the universe in 16 stages and drew up the main components of rocketry and space exploration: liquid-fuel engines, ways to guide space rockets, regulating the temperature inside space rockets, making spacewalks for extra-vehicular activity, protecting cosmonauts from the high gravity forces of powered flight, constructing long-duration interplanetary space stations, building special launch ramps for space rockets, etc.[41] He also encouraged the Soviet government to use fiction and popular culture to champion the conquest of space and ensure its popularity.[42]

In the second phase of his life, Tsiolkovskii no longer revisited the technical elements linked to the construction of rockets, preferring instead to emphasize the religious background of spatial conquest. Since the 1960s, Tsiolkovskii has been called a "disciple of Fiodorov," even if he always denied this influence. The two men knew each other, but Fiodorov's influence on him occurred not so much on the theme of the conquest of space[43] as on that of the transformation of human bodies:

> And the Earth, and we other humans, and all contemporary organic life on the planet, were material of the sun. We have always lived and we always will, but each time in a new form and, of course, without memories of the past.[44]

Tsiolkovskii seems to have been a fervent believer and sought to make the events described in the Bible compatible with modern science. For him, it was evident that the conquest of space is not an end in itself, but a technical means to fulfill humanity's self-perfection and the search for happiness. Soviet propaganda did not wish to highlight Tsiolkovskii's philosophical presuppositions, which diverged from the regime's atheist ideology, and a number of his religious writings long remained forbidden for publication.

Tsiolkovskii's belief in pan-psychism differs from Fiodorov's materialism. The world, he claimed, was guided by a "cause" (*prichina*), and the universe was a living being endowed with a mind, since the intellect is located in each atom.[45] Like Fiodorov, he advocated a monist approach to the cosmos. In his *Monism of the Universe* (*Monizma vselennoi*), published in 1925, he states that we must think of earthly life and the beyond in terms of unity. Humankind is only an assemblage of cells, which themselves are mere assemblages of liquids and gases: since all is divisible down to the level of the atom and humankind is part of an eternal whole, it cannot be conceived autonomously from the cosmos: "I am not only a materialist, but a pan-psychist, who recognizes the sensitivity of the whole universe. I consider this property to be inseparable from materiality."[46]

Tsiolkovskii also seems to have been inspired by the German philosopher Carl du Prel (1839–1899), author of *Die Philosophie der Mystik* (1885), which had been translated into Russian. Du Prel was famous for drawing a link between cosmic and biological evolution, stating that Darwinian natural selection applied to planetary bodies just as it did to living organisms.[47] As an inhabitant of Kaluga, Tsiolkovskii was also probably familiar with the theosophist publications of the local Lotus publishing house.[48] Many of his texts thus seem based on theosophist conceptions of a "secret doctrine." Tsiolkovskii also believed in extraterrestrial intelligence[49] and in the existence of superior "ethereal" (*efirnyi*) beings, like angels or spirits, who live in space and help humans decipher celestial messages.[50]

Among his disciples, Aleksandr Chizhevskii (1857–1964) played a central role in shaping Cosmist theories.[51] Chizhevskii's career was more or less typical for an original researcher in the Soviet period, in the sense that it alternated between recognition and repression. In 1924, then a member of the group of bio-Cosmists, Chizhevskii published a German-language introduction to Tsiolkovskii's theories, which played a key role in launching the first Soviet space experiment as well as making space conquest fashionable among the general public.[52] In 1926, both Tsiolkovskii and Chizhevskii participated in the world's first experiment in the field of space biology. In the 1920s and 1930s, Chizhevskii worked at the Medical Department of Moscow State University, at the Institute of Biological Physics at the Ministry of Health, and then at the Zoo-Psychology Laboratory of the People's Commissariat for Education of the Russian Federation. His main book, *Physical Factors of the Historic Process* (*Fizicheskie faktory istoricheskogo protsessa*), published in 1924, earned him a rebuke from Stalin, who demanded that he retract his theories concerning the influence of the sun over human activity. A self-proclaimed sun-worshiper and poet of his time, Chizhevskii refused and was repressed, spending eight years in the GULAG between 1942 and 1950, and then being imprisoned in Karaganda until 1958. Thereafter, he was permitted to return to Moscow, where he ran an aero-ionification laboratory under the USSR State Planning Organization. Not until 1995 was the most complete version of his manuscript, *The Earth in the Embrace of the Sun* (*Zemlia v ob''iatiiakh solntsa*), finally published.

Like Tsiolkovskii, Chizhevskii was a fervent supporter of the Soviet space program and hoped to see the conquest of other planets, since "in subjugating nature and our victory over it, the goal of the final triumph of human knowledge will be realized."[53] Above all, he contributed to developing two scientific domains, which he called heliobiology – the study of the impact of solar flare cycles on human history – and heliotaraxy – the study of the effect of solar activity on the biosphere.[54] According to him, the Earth's physical fields, variations of solar activity, solar magnetism, and dependent geomagnetic oscillations all impact human life:

> It is not the earth, but the cosmic spaces that will become our homeland, and we are just starting to feel the importance of radiation, in all its authentic

immenseness, for terrestrial existence and the displacement of remote celestial bodies.[55]

Analyzing sunspot records and proxies as well as battles, revolutions, riots, and wars for the period 500 BCE to 1922 CE, he found that 80 percent of the most significant events occurred around the sunspot maximum. The history of humankind, he therefore claimed, responded to cosmic regularities (*zakonomernost'*) – a notion later developed by Lev Gumilev (1912–1992). In his "historiometric" works, Chizhevskii states that human history is shaped by 11-year cycles in the sun's activity, as manifest in political events (revolts, wars, revolutions) and catastrophes such as power shortages or plane crashes. Chizhevskii's works heralded a new stage in the evolution of Cosmist theories in that he was more removed from Fiodorovism than Tsiolkovskii and was more explicitly focused on the sole topic of space – in particular sun-centered theories – than on the question of humanity's overcoming the state of death; moreover, he emphasized a sort of cosmic determinism that did not exist in Fiodorov's works.

Cosmism, a paradoxical reading of the occult

Cosmism cannot be reduced to a specifically Russian phenomenon, explicable entirely by its local cultural context. It also has to be situated within larger intellectual traditions such as occultism – though the issue here is not to distribute labels of belonging, but instead to inquire into parallelisms, mimetisms, and intellectual hybridizations.

Cosmism shares numerous features with the classic occultist traditions, such as Kabbalah, astrology, and alchemy. Its main presupposition is that the separation, formulated during the Renaissance, between metaphysics – either institutionalized religions or arcane sciences – and the modern sciences is a confusion of human thought, a negation of the multiplicity of the dimensions of human existence. As such, Cosmism, like occultism, appeals to the recreation of holistic forms of knowledge, forms that would reconcile mind and matter, metaphysics and science. These holistic forms of knowledge are supposed to provide access to a higher reality, a hidden and ideal world. This presupposition is common to both intellectual traditions, although their interpretations differ on the relation between reality and the hidden world. For occultism, this higher reality is *parallel* to the real world in which humanity lives, whereas Cosmism maintains that the real world is destined to become a higher one: for the former, there are two co-existing worlds, while for the latter they are one and the same, but occurring at different times. With occultism, the difference between the two worlds is one of essence, while for the latter it is uniquely temporal.

The occultist and Cosmist traditions meet up again with the idea that holistic knowledge, which enables the passage to another world, must be founded on a certain connectedness and the recreation of a lost link. For occultism, this connectedness between the different levels of reality is materialized in the secret doctrines that humanity has inherited from a time when it could still feel the

unity of itself and the cosmos, a premonition that is lost today and that contemporary humans must seek in ancient texts, whose meanings are concealed or occulted. In Cosmism, however, connectedness materializes with the rebirth of the past, properly speaking, since the return of the dead, in various physical forms, heralds the reconciliation of humanity with itself and its natural environment. Where occultism views connectedness from an intellectualized angle – that of lost forms of knowledge to be rediscovered and relearned – Cosmism does seek out intermediaries: it is the dead themselves who will return to symbolize the vanished link, not the texts or the practices of the living. The idea of a living knowledge (*zhivoe znanie*), so dear to occultist thinking, thus finds in Cosmism a practical implementation – that of the resurrection – pushed to its extreme. Another trait that dissociates the two movements is probably that of moralism: Cosmism calls for the redemption of humanity – the Christian theme par excellence – and therefore makes a moralizing judgment of the contemporary failure of humanity – a feature that is very noticeable in Fiodorov's writings in particular. This trait, however, is largely absent from the occult traditions, even though it is found in some currents, such as Guénonian Traditionalism.[56]

One of the major differences distinguishing Cosmism from the other occult traditions is its socialism. According to Cosmism, hidden reality will become obvious to all humanity, not just a small group of the privileged. The secret character of the activities of connectedness as a sort of "lodge" for the initiated does not comprise part of the intellectual and organizational apparatus of Cosmism; on the contrary, it likes to speak to the greatest number. For Fiodorov, humanity as a whole must participate in the "common tasks" of resurrecting the dead and conquering space. This socialism, however, is not without its totalitarian background: it amounts to an obligation, since the resurrection it heralds will not be individual but collective. Individual refusal cannot, therefore, be tolerated, and nobody will escape the military brigades working toward the transformation of the cosmos.

Here, Cosmism is far from the individualist features of other occult traditions, which instead tend to emphasize the personal nature of the quest for spiritual awakening and accord value to belonging to an elite. For the Cosmists, the transformation of man into superman is to eventuate through the authoritarianism of an enlightened state and a certain measure of physical violence, both features that are pushed to their extreme in the eugenist theories of Tsiolkovskii. In the other occult traditions, which do not have a totalitarian character but rather emphasize the individuality of each person's path, the idea of violence against humanity in the name of its obligatory awakening is absent. Cosmism awaits the re-animation of humanity into a single universal organism – and the conjunction between two adjectives, single and universal, is a sign of totalitarian thought – whereas occultism sketches a world of awakening filled with multiple, diverse, specific individualities, each one of which has, via different paths, formed its consciousness of the harmony of man and the cosmos.

In terms of observance, Cosmism proves much poorer than occultism. Its calls to connect body, mind, and soul did not produce any concrete practices

applicable to everyday life, even if Tsiolkovskii, for example, claimed he spoke to angels. For Fiodorov, man's harmony with the cosmos was created through a specific agriculture-based economic system: inspired by the Slavophiles, he saw agriculture as the economic sector that was most harmonious. Tsiolkovskii, by contrast, was more focused on "cosmic industry" than "cosmic agriculture." The nationalist character of Cosmism also distances it from the occult traditions, which do not lay claim to the superiority of one nation over another. According to them, the quest is at once individual and universal, but not national, even if Elena Blavatsky (1831–1891) and Nikolai Rerikh have also commented on the uniqueness of the "Russian way." In Cosmism, in particular the Fiodorovian variety, Russian messianism is an intrinsic part of the utopian message. This nationalism was expressed differently by Tsiolkovskii, who placed greater stress on the progress of Soviet science on matters of space conquest. This nationalist narrative is today being heavily revised by the Russian neo-Cosmists, according to whom Russia alone, through its awareness of the religious bases of all scientific progress, is able to show the path to a humanity in perdition, as we will see in Chapter 2.

While nearly all occult traditions deem that higher knowledge has been better preserved in the East than in the West, this Orientalist fascination is practically absent from Cosmism. With the exception of Fiodorov's texts, in which he frames Zoroastrianism as a precursor of Eastern Christianity[57] and expresses fascination with the Pamir Mountains, neither Tsiolkovskii nor Chizhevskii was oriented toward the Orient. The presence of the main Soviet Cosmist theoreticians in Kaluga, the "capital" of Russian theosophy, can lead us to suppose that there were direct influences from theosophy to Cosmism. Yet the Cosmists of the Soviet era, such as Tsiolkovskii, are closer to the Western ufologists than they are to the classical strands of occultism. For them, the space of human self-realization has evolved; it is no longer situated in a mystic East of Egypt or Babylonian wisdom, in Brahmanic or Buddhist knowledge, nor on the high plateaus of the Himalayas. Instead, it is located in the extraterrestrial world: thanks to space flight, human liberation from the Earth has geographically shifted the future of humanity from the East toward the cosmos.

The ambivalent relation of Cosmism to temporality, however, links it partly to occultist traditions. This complexity comes from the fact that Cosmism can, paradoxically, be read simultaneously as turned toward the future – the quest for a new mankind – and toward the past – the resurrection of the dead. In much the same way that the Cosmists expected science to fight against the decomposition of bodies and to enable the displacement of humans in time and space, the alchemists of the Renaissance sought methods by which to transform living bodies and objects, and to travel through the corridors of space and time. For the Cosmists, the magical knowledge of alchemy was supposed to evolve into simple scientific and technical prowess. The Cosmists, then, participated in Gnosticism insofar as they believed in a magical power to transform the world, but they concentrated this power in technology.

Despite its technologizing obsessions, Cosmism has continued to assert that the mastery of the machine was only a means to attain a higher degree of humanity,

and not an end in itself: machines have utility only in order to help humans develop their physical and psychic potentialities. For Cosmism, human control of nervous-energy flows will make it possible to change reality over the long term. As such, Fiodorov, Tsiolkovskii, and Chizhevskii all developed pan-psychic theories: as thought is lodged in atoms and these atoms occupy the entire universe, the universe itself can be considered a living and thinking being. Human transformation thus depends on the inherent active teleological forces and the supreme – nomogenetic – causality that brings the world forward. The Cosmists are, however, marked by an anthropocentric reading of this interaction: humans must, through an active and conscious process, integrate themselves into the whole ambient cosmos. Some see this anthropo-Cosmism as a Russian tradition that has been stamped by the personalism of Russian philosophy, according to which the person (*lichnost'*) who lives in harmony with the collective is emphasized, while the individual, cut off from the group, is criticized. However, Chizhevskii's theories point toward a strong determinism: they no longer exult humankind's capacity to transform nature, including its own, but conceive humans as beings subjected to cosmic activities over which they have little control. Despite this deterministic presupposition, which does not exist in the works of either Fiodorov or Tsiolkovskii, all Cosmist theoreticians share the occultist idea that the ultimate knowledge is awareness.

* * *

Cosmism is a non-conventional spiritual tradition that combines strong allusions to Christianity (redemption via resurrection), a pan-psychic reading of the universe, and belief in still-unknown cosmic forces and an extraterrestrial future for humanity. Its complexity resides in its twofold scientific aspect. It is both a science of spatial conquest – construed as conventional, legitimate science and endorsed by the Soviet regime as the embodiment of progress – and a science of modifying current material realities using the force of the spirit, which our societies perceive as illegitimate or irrational. Without the success of space conquest, which did indeed broaden the limits of human possibilities, Cosmism's scientific pretensions would have remained marginal. It would not have been able to present itself as anything other than a pseudo- or a para-science. But its ability to predict, and then to accompany, the message sent with the Soviet conquest of space increased its power of expression and reception tenfold.

Responding to the fashion for "science with a conscience," Cosmism presented itself as a Soviet scientific religion, a mysticism of technology able to speak to Soviet society, torn between exulting its industrial exploits, ecological concerns, and spiritual interrogations. Buoyed by many occult convictions, of which it offers a modern reading, Cosmism advanced holistic responses and aimed to fundamentally rethink the boundaries of the visible skies. Reprising an archetype of human thought according to which the physical sky above our heads is the place of the divine, it tried to find novel formulations for human interrogations into the meaning of life and humanity's place in the universe.

Rooted in both Orthodox messianism and the celebration of Soviet technological advancements, Cosmism has been a common ground for post-Soviet Russian nationalisms; it has reappeared, implicitly or explicitly, in many nationalist doctrines, in particular as the bedrock of Russia's geographical metanarratives.

Notes

1 First published in 2012 as "Totalitarian Utopia, The Occult, and Technological Modernity In Russia: The Intellectual Experience Of Cosmism," in Menzel, Hagemeister, and Rosenthal, eds., *The New Age of Russia*, 238–258.
2 Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); Irene Masing-Delic, *Abolishing Death: A Salvation Myth of Russian 20th-Century Literature* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002); Boris Groys and Michael Hagemeister, eds., *Die Neue Menschheit. Biopolitische Utopien in Russland zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2005).
3 The most comprehensive study on Cosmism is George M. Young, Jr., *The Russian Cosmists: The Esoteric Futurism of Nikolai Fedorov and His Followers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
4 Steven J. Dick and Roger D. Launius, eds., *Societal Impact of Spaceflight* (Washington, DC: NASA, 2007).
5 On Romanticism as ideology, see George Gusdorf, *Le romantisme* (Paris: Payot, 1993).
6 On Organicism, see Judith Schlanger, *Les métaphores de l'organisme* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1995).
7 Title of a chapter in Gusdorf's *Le romantisme*.
8 Jules de Gaultier, *Revue philosophie de la France et de l'étranger* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1911).
9 On this topic, see Alexander Vucinich, *Darwin in Russian Thought* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988); Loren R. Graham, *Science in Russia and the Soviet Union: A Short History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).
10 Alexander Vucinich, "N. Ia. Danilevskii: Codification of Anti-Darwinism," in Vucinich, *Darwin in Russian Thought*, 118–150.
11 Patrick Sériot, "Aux sources du structuralisme: une controverse biologique en Russie," *Etudes de Lettres* (1994): 89–103.
12 Lev S. Berg, *Nomogenez (Evoliutsiia na osnove zakonomernostei)* (St. Petersburg: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1922). Translated in English as *Nomogenesis, or Evolution Determined by Law* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1966).
13 On Baer and his successors, see the works of Patrick Sériot, *Structure et totalité: Les origines intellectuelles du structuralisme en Europe centrale et orientale* (Paris: PUF, 1999).
14 On his life and thought, see Dmitri Stremooukhoff, *Soloviev et son œuvre messianique* (Lausanne: L'âge d'homme, 1975).
15 Fedor Dostoïevski, *Journal d'un écrivain, 1873–1881* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), 505–506.
16 Ibid., 833.
17 Viacheslav Shestakov, *Eskhatologiia i utopiia. Ocherki russkoi filosofii i kul'tury* (Moscow: Vlados, 1995).
18 On the links between Romanticism and the cosmos, see Jean Clair, ed., *Cosmos: From Romanticism to the Avant Garde* (Quebec: Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 1999).
19 The main work on Fiodorov is Hagemeister, *Nikolaj Fiodorov: Studien zu Leben*. See also Young, *Nikolai F. Fiodorov* and Lukashevich, *N.F. Fëdorov*.

20 George M. Young Jr., "Fiodorov's Transformations of the Occult," in *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture*, ed. Bernice G. Rosenthal (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1997), 172.
21 *Filosofiia obshchego dela* was published posthumously, the first volume in 1906 at Vernyi (future Alma-Ata), and the second in 1913. His texts have been republished in Anastasiia Gacheva and Svetlana Semenova, eds., *N.F. Fiodorov: Sobranie sochinenii v chetyrekh tomakh* (Moscow: Progress, 1995–2000).
22 Jean Clair, "From Humboldt to Hubble," in Clair, ed., *Cosmos*, 25.
23 Nikolai Fiodorov, "Filosofiia obshchego dela," in Semenova and Gacheva, eds., *Russkii kosmizm*, 70. More in Olga Lavrenova, "Filosofiia prostranstva v russkom kosmizme," in *Voobrazhenie prostranstva, prostranstvo voobrazheniia*, eds. Ivan Mitin and Dmitri N. Zamiatin (Moscow: Agraf, 2009), 82–93.
24 Nikolai Setnitskii, *Russkie mysliteli o Kitae. V.S. Solov'ev i N.F. Fëdorov* (Harbin: n.p., 1926).
25 Nikolai Fiodorov, "Po povodu khristianskikh pamiatnikov v Kitae," *Russkii vestnik* 1 (1901): 151–166.
26 Nikolai Fiodorov, *Filosofiia obshchego dela*, vol. 1 (Lausanne: L'âge d'homme, 1985), 268.
27 Fiodorov, *Filosofiia obshchego dela*, vol. 1, 268.
28 Ibid., 262.
29 Cited without precise references in Lukashevich, *N.F. Fiodorov*, 270.
30 Young, "Fiodorov's Transformations of the Occult," 181.
31 Fiodorov, *Filosofiia obshchgo dela*, vol. 1, 270.
32 Accordingly, each member of the commune would note down his dreams and thoughts, would be called before a psychological council, and would benefit from the therapies proposed by the council, under the supervision of the Orthodox Church; brides and grooms would be chosen in accordance with "psychogenetic" criteria, etc.
33 Dmitri Shlapentokh, "Bolshevism, Nationalism and Statism: Soviet Ideology in Formation," *Cahiers du monde russe* 4 (1996): 429–466.
34 On Cosmist societies, see Michael Hagemeister, "Russian Cosmism in the 1920s and Today," in Rosenthal, ed., *The Occult*, 195–196; James T. Andrews, "In Search of a Red Cosmos: Space Exploration, Public Culture, and Soviet Society," in Dick and Launius, eds., *Societal Impact of Spaceflight*, 43–44; Asif A. Siddiqi, "Imagining the Cosmos: Utopians, Mystics, and the Popular Culture of Spaceflight in Revolutionary Russia," *OSIRIS* 23 (2008): 268–271.
35 Hagemeister, "Konstantin Tsiolkovskii and the Occult Roots."
36 Vladimir V. Lytkin, "Tsiolkovsky's Inspiration," *Ad Astra*, November-December (1998): 34–39.
37 Siddiqi, "Imagining the Cosmos," 264.
38 Andrews, "In Search of a Red Cosmos," 46.
39 "Tsiolkovskii Konstantin Eduardovich," Imia Rossii, http://top50.nameofrussia.ru/person.html?id=79.
40 The text is available in English as Konstantin E. Tsiolkovsky, *Exploration of the Universe with Reaction Machines: Exploring the Unknown* (Washington, DC: The NASA History Series, 1995).
41 More in James T. Andrews, *Red Cosmos: K.E. Tsiolkovskii, Grandfather of Soviet Rocketry* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2009).
42 Boris Liapunov, "Fantasty o kosmose. Ot istokov kosmicheskoi ery do nashikh dnei," *Baikal*, no. 1 (1968): 133–136.
43 On the differences between these two thinkers, see Vladimir Kaziutinskii, "Kosmizm i kosmicheskaia filosofiia," in *Osvoenie aerokosmicheskogo prostranstva: Proshloe, nastoiashchee, budushchee*, ed. Boris Raushenbakh (Moscow: IIET RAN, 1997). This point is confirmed by Siddiqi, "Imagining the Cosmos," 266–267.

44 Konstantin Tsiolkovskii, *Grezy o zemle i nebe: nauchno-fantasticheskie proizvedeniia* (Tula: Priokskoe izd., 1986).
45 "Nauchnye osnovaniia religii," "Etika ili estestvennye osnovy nravstvennosti," "Nirvana," etc.
46 Konstantin Tsiolkovskii, "Monizm Vselennoi," in Semenova and Gacheva, eds., *Russkii kosmizm*, 266.
47 Hagemeister, "Konstantin Tsiolkovskii and the Occult Roots."
48 Maria Carlson, *No Religion Higher Than Truth: A History of the Theosophical Movement in Russia, 1875–1922* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).
49 Vladimir Lytkin, Ben Finney, and Liudmila Alepko, "Tsiolkovsky – Russian Cosmism and Extraterrestrial Intelligence," *Royal Astronomical Society Quarterly Journal* 36, no. 4 (1995): 369–376.
50 Hagemeister, "Konstantin Tsiolkovskii and the Occult Roots."
51 See his memoirs: Aleksandr Chizhevskii, *Na beregu vselennoi: gody druzhby s Tsiolkovskim. Vospominaniia* (Moscow: Mysl', 1995).
52 Siddiqi, "Imagining the Cosmos," 284.
53 Aleksandr Chizhevskii, "Kolybel' zhizni i pul'sy Vselennoi," *Zemnoe ekho solnechnykh bur'*, etc.
54 Boris Vladimirsky, and N.A. Temuryants, *Solar Activity and the Biosphere: Heliobiology: From A.L. Chizhevsky to the Present* (Moscow: Russian Academy of Natural Sciences, 1999).
55 Aleksandr Chizhevskii, "Kolybel' zhizni i pul'sy Vselennoi," in Semenova and Gacheva, eds., *Russkii kosmizm*, 319.
56 Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).
57 Young, "Fiodorov's Transformations of the Occult," 176.

2 Larger, higher, farther north …

Russia's geographical metanarratives[1]

At the grand reopening of the Russian Geographical Society in 2009, then-Prime Minister Vladimir Putin explicitly linked the greatness of Russia as a state and as a culture to the size of its territory: "When we say great, a great country, a great state – certainly, size matters … When there is no size, there is no influence, no meaning."[2] This alleged link between size and meaning illustrates in an exemplary manner the idea, common in Russia, that the destiny of the country is linked to its geographic scope. According to Putin's geographist logic, it is impossible for Russia – as a country whose territory covers one-sixth of the Earth's surface and extends from the heart of Europe to the Pacific Ocean, and from the Arctic Ocean to the Kazakh steppes and the subtropical shores of the Black Sea – to be a power without influence on the international stage or a culture without global reach.

Ever since the first texts inquiring into the nature of the Russian state, written in the second half of the eighteenth century under the impetus of early Romanticism – those of Mikhail V. Lomonosov (1711–1765), Nikolai Karamzin (1766–1826) and Empress Catherine II (1729–1796), for example – numerous references have been made to Russia's geographical characteristics. Geographical determinism constituted a legitimate mode of reflection on nations at the time: Montesquieu developed the most well-known theory of it in his famous *Esprit des lois* (1748), in which he claimed that climates have a powerful influence not only over human activities, but also over the nature of political regimes.[3] Reference to geography also dominated the narratives of the Slavophile and pan-Slavic schools in the nineteenth century, justifying Russia's territorial conquests in Central Asia and the Far East, as well as its interference in Europe and the Balkans. It further constituted a not insignificant aspect of the messianic rhetoric that the Soviet Union cultivated.

This geographical metanarrative persists in contemporary Russia, in forms and patterns adapted to the new conditions.[4] For the first time in five centuries, the country is shrinking rather than growing territorially. The Far East, which covers 36 percent of Russian territory, has lost 22 percent of its population since 1990. Rural northern Russia, the so-called non-black soil areas, is also dying, creating a veritable "shrinking skin" that sees whole villages disappear. The 2010 census found that 36,000 of 133,700 Russian villages had fewer than 10 permanent inhabitants.[5] Arable land is abandoned: the total sown area fell by 36

percent between 1990 and 2012, from 118 million hectares to 76 million, before beginning a slow recovery that saw 79 million hectares cultivated in 2015.[6] The sense of a diminished space compared with what would be the ideal type of Russia's natural and legitimate size is a fundamental driver of these present-day narratives. All are marked by resentment directed abroad, misunderstandings about the reasons for the collapse of the Soviet Union, and fear that the dynamics of territorial fragmentation inherited from the disintegration of the Soviet Union may continue.

Geographical metanarratives advance a supposedly comprehensive and teleological explanation of Russia through a master idea – territorial size and location in space are the drivers of the country's mission in the world, and of the nature of its state and culture. Their main function is to develop a theoretical assumption and transform it into an ideological tool that goes beyond data and maps. While they are flags waved mostly by nationalist-minded intellectuals, they also have a much wider audience – although difficult to measure and analyze – that includes parts of the elite, the educated middle classes whose professions have suffered from a loss of prestige, some student circles, and members of the general public. Whether in radical or moderate, extreme or subtle, forms, these metanarratives constitute a *doxa* – a non-homogenous set of opinions, popular presuppositions that shape contemporary Russian culture and politics.

These metanarratives have gained acceptance not necessarily on account of their arguments per se, but because they have managed to capture an atmosphere and to situate it within the spirit of the time. Upon the intellectual decline of Marxism, socioeconomic explanations lost their legitimacy, and have been replaced by the prevailing idea that the post-Cold War world can be explained by fundamentals like territory, culture, and religion. This forceful return to a kind of "civilizational geopolitics" can be illustrated, for example, by the immense success that Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* enjoyed in Russia.[7] Critical geopolitics also returned to academic circles, including the works of Vadim Tsymburskii (1957–2009) and his reflections on the notion of empire, among others.[8] The great Russian philosophers of the Silver Age and emigration – such as Vladimir Soloviev, Sergei Bulgakov (1871–1944), and Pavel Florenskii (1882–1937) – interpreted Orthodoxy as a religion that grants particular attention to territory (through the notion of canonical territory and philosophical interpretations thereof) and that seeks to ground its harmony with the universe (through the idea of the Kingdom of the Spirit or of the Heavens). All this makes Russia fertile ground for geographical metanarratives.

In this chapter, I discuss the three main geographical metanarratives currently in circulation. All of them argue that a specific element gives Russia its uniqueness among nations: Russia's territory is *larger* than other countries in the world and forms a specific continent (Eurasianism); Russia is going *higher* in the universe (Cosmism); and Russia is going *farther north* (Arctism). In their own ways, these three metanarratives all involve spatial criteria: the territorial dimension and the location between Europe and Asia (Eurasianism); the conquest of space as a new way of continuing territorial expansion that has messianic

meaning (Cosmism); and the Nordic location of Russia as the revenge over the lost Soviet territories (Arctism).

Larger: Eurasia as a metanarrative of the empire

Developed among Russian émigrés in Western and Central Europe in the 1920s and early 1930s, Eurasianism claimed to have founded a new science of Russia, based on geography and a holistic reading of the sciences.[9] According to Eurasianist theories, interpreting the nation in temporal terms results from an epistemological imperialism that legitimates the supremacy of Europe and depreciates other peoples.[10] If Russia were to "unlearn" the West and perceive itself geographically, then it would no longer be a backward country but a legitimate and natural empire whose mission would unveil itself to the world. In the Eurasianist conception, Russia has a "transparent"[11] geographical structure that reveals its identity characteristics to anyone able to decipher it.

The concept of topogenesis – or "place-development" (*mestorazvitie*) – elaborated by the geographer Petr Savitskii (1895–1968) stands for the teleological link that Eurasianism posits between the Russian territory, its cultures, its politics, and the peoples living on its soil.[12] The community of destiny of the Eurasian peoples is therefore intrinsically linked to the geographical specificities of Eurasia as a third continent that is neither Europe nor Asia, and that is defined by its vastness and its continental character.[13] Eurasianism so sought to theorize its ideology geographically that this "territorialized" aspect drew much of the fire from the movement's critics. In a polemical text written at the end of the 1920s, Prince Iurii Shirinskii-Shikhmatov (1892–1942) accused the movement of believing that "Russia's path of predestination lies not in a spiritual trait but in a material, geographical element."[14]

The idea that there is a historical time that depends upon spatial characteristics specific to Russia was also expressed by George Vernadskii (1887–1973). A "fellow traveler" of Eurasianism in his early years, he would go on to become a Yale-based historian of medieval Russia. His first publication, "Against the Sun: The Russian State's Expansion into the Orient," which appeared in 1914 in *Russkaia mysl'*, seeks to demonstrate the simultaneous existence of different historical times. In it, Vernadskii claims that:

> what is already in the past for Muscovite Russia can still be present in Siberia depending on the remoteness from Moscow. This fact expresses the law of correspondence of time and space as a factor of the historical process. A social phenomenon obeys anaologous changes, which surmount space and time. For one and the same time a social phenomenon differs depending upon its occurrence in space. […] The further we see, the more we see the repercussions of that which was once in the center and is long since dead.[15]

Vernadskii went so far as to specify this relation to space–time: the distance of 1,000 *verstes* is equal to a return to the past of 100 years. As a result, there is not

only an asynchrony between center and periphery, which live in different eras, but a countable materialization of Russia's various times. In this way, Eurasia can become an object of astronomical science, in that it has properties that are specific to the universe: The further one sees, the more one goes back in time.

This geographical metanarrative also circulated among Soviet elites during the late Soviet period, mostly thanks to Lev Gumilev, son of those "accursed poets" Anna Akhmatova and Nikolai Gumilev. Highly contested by Marxist-Leninist theoreticians, Gumilev's views attained their heyday during the years of perestroika and since his death have come to be seen as creeds that are immune to criticism.[16] In early post-Soviet Russia, neo-Eurasianist metanarratives were the most elaborate of the various conservative ideologies to take shape thanks to two prolific writers, Aleksandr Dugin (1962) and Aleksandr Panarin (1940–2003). Many intellectuals and politicians have found neo-Eurasianism attractive, as it has enabled them to reconceive the collapse of the Soviet Union and restore Russia's disrupted continuity by recasting it in spatial rather than temporal terms. Although not a structured political grouping, neo-Eurasianism has nonetheless inspired both Vladimir Zhirinovsky's Liberal-Democratic Party (LDPR) and Gennadii Ziuganov's Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF): both parties have stressed the geopolitical aspects of Eurasianism and claimed Russia's mission as an engine of stability for the entire Eurasian continent.[17] These parties have contributed to the association of Eurasianism not only with political currents nostalgic for the Soviet regime, but also with provocative imperialist statements[18] – reinforced by Dugin's criticism of Ukrainian independence (which made him *persona non grata* in Kyiv)[19] and his key role in promoting the notion of Novorossiya since the 2014 crisis (see Chapter 9).[20]

Since the beginning of the 2000s, however, the Eurasian metanarrative has undergone a profound transformation. It has become a victim of its own success, meaning that it is now used as a catch-all vision of Russia and its neighbors that presupposes a certain cultural unity in the post-Soviet region over the *longue durée*. A soft version of neo-Eurasianism, in which only the notion of Russia's role as a geopolitical driver in Eurasia is retained, has been adopted by the Presidential Administration in order to ground the legitimacy of the Putin regime in the nostalgia for the Soviet era shared by a large part of the population.[21] In 2011, Putin's first foreign policy move after announcing that he was standing for a third presidential term was to express his desire to see the creation of a Eurasian Union, including several of the post-Soviet states. The objective of this new Eurasian Union would not be to rebuild a unified state, but to institute a few supranational mechanisms in specific domains that would guarantee Moscow a right to oversee the evolution of some of its neighbors.[22] References to Eurasia as a space undergoing economic and political reintegration under Moscow's leadership have therefore become part of the Putinian ideological mainstream. As a result, neo-Eurasianist ideology per se has undergone significant ideological twists, lost its homogeneity, and been put in the difficult position of being at once marginalized and fashionable, dissident and official.[23]

With the exception of the incumbent regime, which picks and chooses Eurasia-related symbols, supporters of the Eurasianist metanarrative share one set of convictions. They assert the common historical destiny of the Russians and the non-Russian peoples of the former empire and the former Soviet Union. This assertion has political consequences because it implies that today's independences are just parentheses destined to be closed, and that the political and economic reintegration of the former Soviet space respond to a kind of law of history (*zakonomernost'*): Ukraine, the Caucasus, and Central Asia are "destined" to be reintegrated into a unified space dominated by Moscow. In the Eurasianist view, the central geographical position of Eurasia, situated at the crossroads of the Old World, inevitably entails a political organization based on modernizing the imperial tradition. The only legitimate structure for Russia is the empire or federation, in which ethnic minorities are endowed with rights but remain subordinate to the Russian "big brother." The task of geography is then to refute the secessionist tendencies of the non-Russian peoples of Eurasia.[24]

This Eurasia is the vector of a broader geopolitical project: it rejects Europe and/or the West and/or capitalism through criticism of "Atlanticist" domination, which is considered disastrous for the rest of humanity, and states that Russia–Eurasia is the only possible driver of a multipolar world for the twenty-first century.[25] The Eurasianist metanarrative thus promotes its own view of the world and of nations and believes that there are cultural constants that explain the deeper meaning of contemporary political events: today's conflicts result not from economic and social struggles, but from a clash between the cultural essences of peoples; religion is the foundation of civilizations and provides them with an unchangeable nature; and civilizations, rather than individuals or social groups, are the true driving force of history. Eurasianism therefore commits itself to shaping new academic disciplines that study these features: geopolitics, culturology, conflictology, conspirology, ethno-conflictology, ethno-politology, ethno-psychology, and so on.[26] This essentialist interpretation of the world serves an undisguised political objective: to show that the Western model is not applicable to Eurasian countries because civilizations cannot adopt external criteria and values.

The geographical prism, which was already very pronounced in the works of the founding fathers of Eurasianism in the 1920s, has long framed the neo-Eurasianist metanarrative. Aleksandr Panarin, head of the chair of Political Science in the Faculty of Philosophy at Moscow State University in the 1990s until his death,[27] published a highly successful book entitled *The Revenge of History* (*Revansh istorii*), which, as its name indicates, was intended to refute Francis Fukuyama's famous thesis about the "end of history."[28] Fukuyama's claim, according to which the formation of model civilizations has come to an end, is wrong, Panarin argues, because the European paradigm of liberalism and parliamentary democracy has failed. A renewal of civilizational awareness – i.e., awareness of the world's inherent diversity – will provide an alternative to the Western model.[29] Unless we are prepared to accept that the failure of European civilization is tantamount to the failure of humanity, Panarin explains, the right

to differ must be elevated to the status of a philosophical principle. In 2002, just a few months before his death, he was awarded the prestigious Solzhenitsyn Prize for his book *The Orthodox Civilization in a Globalized World* (*Pravoslavnaia tsivilizatsiia v global'nom mire*), in which he announced the revenge of an economically backward but spiritually advanced Russia over a West that, he claimed, was losing itself in a technological frenzy.[30]

For Panarin, cultures develop cyclically, by thrusts. The West, he argued, is peculiar in that it has a linear conception of time, expressing its belief in historical progress: only temporality (with "lags" and "advances") accounts for the differences between civilizations, which are classified on a scale reaching from archaic to modern. By contrast, Panarin proposed to restore the category of space to analytic favor and use it in support of non-European nations' right to differ. For him, cultural specificity is not temporal or vertical, but spatial and horizontal. He believed that the predominance of territory over time made Russia evolve cyclically, a phenomenon he called the "idiom of space."[31] He devoted many pages, stained by anti-Semitic sentiments, to comparing Russians and Jews, describing the former as nomads in time and the latter as nomads in space.[32]

This dissociation between temporal and spatial criteria is shaped by two different political experiences: the republican one, which provides individuals with a framework of sociopolitical democracy, and the imperial one, which offers "civilizational" democracy. The republican approach, Panarin argued, is formalistic, narrow, and mechanical, whereas the imperial one is based on the prestigious model of the Roman Empire and offers a more authentic reading of the democratic principle.[33] In Panarin's view, Europe gives primacy to individual rights to the detriment of collective rights, whether regional, ethnic, or religious. It upholds pluralism for individuals, but has a unitarian and hegemonic approach to relations between nations. Eurasia is the exact opposite of the European model, as it promotes "civilizational" rather than individual pluralism. Panarin therefore considered empire to be the most legitimate structure for the Eurasian space. First, it is the only political system able to respond to the challenges of "postmodern" society, since it promotes awareness of civilizations in a world divided along regional and ethnic lines, and provides an ideology of order as a bulwark against today's chaos. Second, empire would be a political embodiment of the horizontal nature and spatial extent of Eurasia, thereby legitimizing it as a "natural" entity. As Panarin's co-author, Boris Erasov, put it, empire is a response to Eurasia's national and religious diversity, "as a political form of organization of the coexistence of a heterogeneous ethnic and confessional conglomerate, of peoples who do not have any other basis for a set of universal norms and a legal order."[34]

Whereas Panarin attempted to ground the Eurasianist geographical metanarrative in reflections inspired by political philosophy, Aleksandr Dugin's use tends to be based on a more classic reading of geopolitics. A very eclectic personality, Dugin has sought inspiration from a great many authors (see Chapter 5). He has borrowed particularly heavily from Carl Schmitt (1888–1985), notably taking up the concept of *nomos*, construed as the general form of organization of the

objective and subjective factors of a given territory, and the theory of *Großraum*, or "large spaces."[35] From Dugin's perspective, geopolitics serves the state in which it is elaborated. Thus, Russian geopolitics could only be Eurasianist, with the aim of restoring Russia's great-power status.[36] Geopolitics is also, he claims, the preserve of the elite: it is opposed to the democratic principle because the ability to know the meaning of things is unavoidably restricted to the leaders.

Dugin attaches great value to this German heritage, and wishes to be viewed as a continental geopolitician on par with Schmitt and Karl Haushofer (1869–1946). Russia's centrality and continental character are, to him, comparable to those of Germany in the 1920s–1930s. He thus develops his own bipolar interpretation of the world, setting up an opposition between the "Heartland," which tends toward authoritarian regimes, and the "World Island," posited as the incarnation of the democratic and commercial system.[37] He combines the classic Eurasianist theories about the third continent with a division of the world into sea-based and land-based powers (thalassocracies and tellurocracies), and links them to various classic pairs of concepts: (Western Christianity/Orthodoxy, West/East, democracy/ideocracy, individualism/collectivism, societies marked by change/societies marked by continuity). The opposition between capitalism and socialism is seen as just one incarnation of a historical clash that is destined to continue in other forms:

> The two primordial concepts of geopolitics are land and sea […] They are outside Man, in all that is solid or liquid. They are also within him: body and blood […] As the two main terms of geopolitics, they are significant both for civilizations of the traditional kind and for wholly modern states, peoples and ideological blocs […] Any state, any empire draws its strength from a preferential development of one of these two categories.[38]

Dugin then divides the world into civilizational zones, in which Russia must strive to establish various geopolitical alliances organized as concentric circles. In Europe, Russia must ally itself with Germany, to which Dugin pays particular attention. In Asia, it has to choose Japan, which is appreciated for its Pan-Asian ideology and its support to the Berlin–Rome–Tokyo axis during World War II. And in the Islamic world, it has to choose Shiite Iran, which is celebrated for its mysticism and revolutionary spirit. Dugin characterizes this Russia–Germany–Japan–Iran alliance – which he sees as challenging the thalassocracies of the United States, Britain in Europe, China in Asia, Turkey in the Muslim world – as a "confederation of large spaces,"[39] inasmuch as each ally is itself an empire that dominates its respective area of civilization. Unlike the Eurasianists of the 1920s, Dugin claims no irreducible, romantic opposition between East and West. In his theories, both Asia and Europe are destined to come under Russian-Eurasian domination.

The strength of the Eurasianist geonarrative lies both in its provision of a widespread geopolitical conceptual framework based on the notion of civilizations (whether "clashing" or "dialoging") as the main actors of world history and

a particular geography-based reading of Russia–Eurasia. This dual frame makes it possible to go beyond the collapse of the Soviet Union and the existence of independent states by restoring the notion of an a-temporal Russian Empire and by rooting criteria of national identity in telluric permanencies.

Higher: from geography to the conquest of space

Projecting identity in spatial terms is not unique to Eurasianist theories. Throughout the twentieth century, other intellectual currents sought to connect debates on the national identity of Russia/the Soviet Union with spatial criteria. However, it is probably the extensions of earthly space to cosmic space that have enabled the greatest innovations in terms of geographical metanarratives. Relying on the prestige of Tsiolkovskii and Chizhevskii, Cosmism was an important component of late Soviet culture during the Brezhnev era, and it has become a fashionable trend in post-Soviet culture, especially among nationalist-minded elites and the intelligentsia.

The ideology's principal theoretician today, Vladimir Dudenkov, chair of philosophy at the St. Petersburg Technological Institute, follows in the footsteps of his predecessors by suggesting the unique relationship between the Russian nation and the cosmos.[40] This link is offered to explain the nature of the "Russian soul," which would be spontaneously oriented toward the universal and the cosmic, and seeks to free itself from earthly physical barriers, seeing the sky as the domain of God.[41] Dudenkov borrows this narrative from Soloviev and Fiodorov, but he also follows the more technological theories of Tsiolkovskii and Chizhevskii in saying that Russia would lose part of its soul if it ceased to be a leader in the exploration of space.

Dudenkov also incorporates many themes from the work of Vladimir Vernadskii (1863–1945), the father of the aforementioned George. A geochemist by training, the elder Vernadskii served as director of the biochemistry laboratory of the Soviet Academy of Sciences from the late 1920s until his death.[42] Renowned throughout Europe, he was especially interested in the energy of living matter. In the 1920s, he developed the notions of the "biosphere" – that the Earth was formed by a geological force he called life – and of the "noosphere," or sphere of thought, presented as the next level of human development. The terrestrial envelope, he claimed, would soon be regulated by human reason, which was itself beginning to appear as a form of energy, as it had the ability to change material processes.[43] Similar, though less elaborate, proposals were made by Fiodor Girenok (1948), professor of anthropology at Moscow State University's Philosophy Faculty,[44] as well as in institutions such as the Institute of Natural Sciences of the Noosphere (*Institut noosfernogo estestvoznaniia*), the Tsiolkovskii Museum, the Chizhevskii Center, and the Institute for Scientific Research in Cosmic Anthropoecology.[45]

The Cosmist narrative is also deployed outside of the circle of individuals who define themselves as theorists of Cosmism per se. Panarin, for instance, regularly argued for the existence of a link between the territorial expansion of

the Russian Empire and a specific relation to the cosmos. He claimed that the difference between Western and Russian culture lies precisely in the connection between man and cosmos. Whereas Western culture has broken the links between microcosm and macrocosm, the Russian world continues to see God in nature. While the West views the cosmos as a dead and mechanical phenomenon, Russia considers it a living being. In his *Orthodox Civilization*, Panarin presents the Russians not only as a "horizontal" people, but also as a "vertical" one.[46] This is a reference to the supposed character of Orthodox civilization, which tends vertically, toward the divine, in contrast to Western man, who would be horizontal by virtue of being inscribed in the materiality of life. According to Panarin, Russia's pre-eminence in this realm can be explained by its territorial reality: it is only possible to feel harmony with God and the universe on the vast Russian plain.[47]

Outside neo-Eurasianist circles, a shared interest in both territory and the cosmos has also emerged among other nationalist movements. Aleksandr Prokhanov (1938), one of the leading figures of Russian nationalism since the 1970s and the editor-in-chief of the weekly newspaper *Zavtra* – a leading producer of nationalist discourse with a Communist veneer – has availed himself of Cosmist assumptions in order to legitimize Russia as an empire and the Soviet experiment as universal. Prokhanov asserts that it is no coincidence that both Fiodorov and Vernadskii were born in Russia, not to mention that the first manned space flight took off from Russia, which is supposedly the exact meeting-point between the Earth and the sky. In an article with the telling title of "Cosmism-Leninism," published in 2010, he discusses the intersection of the Bolshevik Revolution, the industrial successes of Stalinism, and Cosmism. According to him, Leninism's industrializing obsession meant that it implemented the works of Fiodorov, Vernadskii, Tsiolkovskii, and Chizhevskii in its quest to "overcome death, anthropocentrism, to ensure victory over thermodynamics, to create an immortal paradisiacal humanity."[48] Its core aim was a "Russian cosmic mission," translated both in the Russians' universal nature and in the myth of immortality.

Evgenii Troitskii (1928), the founder and president of the Moscow-based Association for the Complex Study of the Russian Nation (AKIRN, *Assotsiatsiia po kompleksnomu izucheniiu russkoi natsii*), deploys a similar scheme. Troitskii presents himself as a great conciliator of various doctrinal movements and offers a synthesis of pan-Slavism, Eurasianism, Cosmism, "Slavic socialism," and racialism. He managed a very close collaboration with the Ministry of Nationalities and Regional Policy in the 1990s and has campaigned for two decades for a law to declare that Russia is the homeland of ethnic Russians and for the abolition of the country's federal structure. Troitskii has developed a modernized version of Cosmism, and he works closely with the Charity Fund of the Mir space station, the Museum of Aviation and Astronautic History, and the Slavic International Union of Aviation and Astronautics (*Slavaviakosmos*), whose stated aim is to "give the Slavic states back their role as former leaders in control of the air and cosmic space."[49] His Cosmist texts combine several classic

features, including feelings of nostalgia for the Soviet regime on the basis that space conquest allowed Russia to establish itself on an equal footing with the United States; a view of human history marked by dialectical materialism (history would be divided into stages of development: traditional, industrial, post-industrial, informational, and then noospheric); and a form of "cosmos-ecology" that supposedly shows, thanks to experiments performed in the Mir station, how to live in harmony with nature.[50]

AKIRN asserts that Russia is the only country to have understood the intimate link between humankind's space progress and its spiritual quest: Russians supposedly have a unique and prophetic cosmic conscience expressed in both the religious and scientific fields.[51] The association has therefore campaigned to have Iurii Gagarin (1934–1968) canonized in order to strengthen the connection between religion and technological progress.[52] Troitskii considers not only that Russia's territorial immensity reveals the nature of the "Russian soul," but also that it opens up the way to the conquest of extraterrestrial worlds, hence the importance given to maintaining a proper Russian science of space. As early as 1991, during the Soviet Union's last months of existence, Troitskii stated that "Cosmism is the indissoluble connection of universal and atmospheric space with the ethnos, the nation."[53]

Cosmism also finds fertile ground in the varieties of New Age thought that have developed in Russia over the past 30 years (see Chapter 4). One of the main New Age movements, inspired by the painter and philosopher Nikolai Rerikh (or Roerich, 1874–1947), advocated a form of spiritualism tinged with Orientalism and references to Buddhism and Hinduism.[54] It claims to borrow from Cosmist theories, which are seen as a form of pantheism or paganism that praises the forces of the universe. This trend is particularly developed in Siberia, especially in the Altai region and Novosibirsk, where the combined legacies of space exploration[55] and followers of Rerikh give a regional flavor to the movement.[56] Cosmist theories have also inspired contemporary art, as is the case with Aleksei Beliaev-Gintovt (1965), the most prominent representative of so-called second modern art in Russia, who received the Kandinsky prize in 2008.[57] Beliaev-Gintovt is close to the neo-Eurasianists and several nationalist counterculture circles. He draws his inspiration largely from the theme of empire, and thus the relation to space. His best-known works combine Cosmist, Aryan, and Eurasianist motifs – for example, the enormous frescoes of the "Novosibirsk" project, which imagine the capital of a future Eurasianist empire; "Kosmoparad 2937," which announces a huge empire in direct connection with the cosmos; or "Space Parade," which glorifies space conquest in an Aryan, Nazi-inspired style.

As expressed in these *publitsistika* texts, religious sensibilities, and modern art, the Cosmist metanarrative is widespread in different cultural niches. It takes on the messianism linked to the Soviet conquest of space, binds religion and technology with accents inspired from occult traditions, and celebrates the divine under a pantheistic, postmodern form. It relies on multiple cultural drivers that legitimize the idea that the cosmos is the natural extension of Russian territory. In this way, it is possible to draw a parallel between Russia's horizontal expanse and its ability to fly, in a concrete way, in space, or, in an allegorical way, toward

God. As Evgenii Troitskii contended, "our vast territory is a passage toward the celestial space."[58]

Farther north: the Arctic as the last territory to conquer

A third geographical metanarrative emerged in the second half of the 2000s, in conjunction with the international community's new focus on the Arctic region. Formerly a remote and secure northern frontier of the Soviet Union, the Arctic has quickly become a potential forepost for twenty-first century Russia due to climate change and new discoveries in energy resources and technologies. In Russia, this focus coincided with the search, undertaken by Putin and his inner circle, for new ideological drivers to legitimate the established regime.[59] Since the mid-2000s, the Arctic region has been transformed into a flagship demonstration of Russia's statehood, a strategy embodied by the president's special representative for cooperation in the Arctic and Antarctica, famous polar explorer Arthur Shilingarov (1939), a member of United Russia and close associate of Putin. On the one hand, Russia's official narrative on the Arctic deploys a belligerent rhetoric inspired by Cold War clichés that portray Russia as a fortress under siege by NATO expansion. On the other, it celebrates international cooperation in the hope of promoting not an *Arctic Race* between great powers, but a *Polar Saga* for all humanity – albeit under Russian guidance.[60]

A more radical Arctic metanarrative has prospered among some nationalist-minded circles, who have sought to revive and update the Soviet mythology of the "Red Arctic" (*krasnaia arktika*) developed in the 1930s during the period of High Stalinism.[61] This decade was critical in fostering feats of Soviet exploration (first Soviet icebreaker to cross the Northern Sea Route in one summer, Soviet plane's world record for long-distance aviation by crossing the North Pole from Moscow to the United States, the Soviet Union being the first nation to land aircraft at the North Pole, etc.) and exploitation of Russia's Arctic regions under the *Glavsevmorput*[62] structure. These accomplishments gave rise to a popular Soviet myth that envisions a Red Arctic, a final outpost of Soviet civilization, an authentic *tabula rasa* on which to build socialism. The Red Arctic made it possible to celebrate the Stalinist values of patriotism, heroism, and human and technological prowess, as well as to underscore the extraordinary industrial capacities of socialism, as it conquered some of the most extreme natural environments. Exulted through newspapers, novels, films, and radio broadcasts, this epic of the Red Arctic deeply marked Russian culture, both at the elite level and among society at large. The myth then fell into discreet oblivion – neither rejected nor exalted – and came to be revived only on specific occasions, such as for the construction of the Baikal-Amur Magistral (BAM) railway in the 1970s.[63]

Soberly in the 1990s and more loudly in the 2000s, the Arctic became a structural component of many Russian nationalist movements. Some see it as, above all, a crucial element in the revival of Russia's great-power status, leading them to focus on geopolitical competition with the West, and in particular with the United States. Popularizations such as Artur Indzhiyev's book *The Arctic Battle:*

Will the North Be Russian? (*Bitva za Arktiku. Budet li sever russkim?*), which was published by one of the major Moscow nationalist handbooks, announced the onset of a sort of World War III in which a weakened Russia will have to prove its heroism in order to safeguard its rights in the Arctic against aggressive Western powers.[64] Others put forward a more spiritual view of the role of the High North in the construction of Russian identity and the pursuit of its traditional messianism. In both cases, the Arctic is presented as Russia's "last chance," a final opportunity to take its "revenge on history." The notion that Russian expansion into the Arctic could attenuate the consequences of territorial losses linked to the collapse of the Soviet Union has become a recurrent theme: the Arctic is presented as rightful compensation for the hegemony lost with the disappearance of the Soviet Union.

Dugin has been one of the most virulent defenders of a Russian Arctic. According to his explosive formulation, "[t]he purpose of our being lies in the expansion of our space. The shelf belongs to us. Polar bears live there, Russian polar bears. And penguins live there, Russian penguins."[65] This passage, cited by *Der Spiegel*, became famous in the West for its radicalism as well as for its inaccuracy (penguins live only in Antarctica). Here Dugin also borrows from the Nazi tradition of Hyperborea as the last unknown continent. He states that Eurasia is giving birth to a new political and spiritual continent, which he calls Arctogeia, and bases his argumentation on Aryan references inspired by the European New Right, Nazi theories, and René Guénon's esoterism (see Chapter 5).[66] He defines the Hyperborean continent as the birthplace of the Aryans, of whom the Russians are the purest descendants. In his *Mysteries of Eurasia* (*Misterii Evrazii*), he elaborates a cosmogony of the world in order to make Siberia, the last "empire of paradise"[67] after Thule, the instrument of his geopolitical desire for domination of the world, justified by Russia's "cosmic destiny."[68]

The Eurasianist Youth Movement, which embraces Dugin's thinking, has organized several demonstrations in support of Russian territorial claims in the Arctic, calling for the Arctic continental shelf to be integrated into the borders of the Russian state and transformed into a new federal district.[69] Then-leader of the movement Aleksandr Bobdunov claimed that:

> the North is not only a base of economic resources, our future in the material sense, but also a territory of the spirit, of heroism, and of overcoming, a symbolic resource of central importance for the future of our country.[70]

Nor have the Communist movements ignored the Arctic theme. This topic is notably of interest to the communists' main ideologist, Aleksandr Prokhanov. In his efforts to legitimate Russia's claims to lead the new Arctic Race, he combines pragmatic arguments with revivalist theories on the Russian nation. He remarks:

> For more than fifteen years immense spaces have been excised from Russia to the south. The Russian people have become more and more northern. The

> Ukrainian black lands have been taken away, as has access to the seas of the south, and Byelorussia.[71]

Post-Soviet Russia is therefore destined to look north, not south, to find its "radiant future." Prokhanov further sees a renewal of Russian messianism in what he calls "the Russian march toward the north" and the assertion that the Arctic Ocean is part of Russian territorial waters.[72] Not without humor, he designates Gazprom as "the corporation of all the Russias" (on the model of the "Church of all the Russias") and notes that the Arctic is likely to become the source of both Russia's material and spiritual power, since:

> the Arctic civilization requires an incredible concentration of force in all domains. It will become, then, a sanctified "common good," in which the peoples of Russia will rediscover their unity, conceived by God as those to whom he destines great missions.[73]

The High North has also become a fashionable topic among public opinion through a revival of interest in the history of Alaska. Since the 1990s, historical and fictional publications about the Russian conquest of Alaska and its sale to the United States in 1867 have multiplied. The idea of a Russian Empire that once stretched from Finland to California, but is now shrinking, fuels nationalist resentment and conspiracy theories about the West's supposed desire to dismember Russia. Along these lines, many works lament the corruption of the Russian elites who decided to sell California and then Alaska for personal financial gain, drawing parallels between these historical events and Russian-American negotiations for the delimitation of territorial boundaries in the Chukchi and Bering Seas in 1990.[74] These texts frame the Russian advance in Alaska as the logical consequence of progress into Siberia, celebrate the spiritual connection between Russians and the indigenous peoples, and emphasize the key role of Orthodoxy in Alaska. These arguments are presented in counterpoint to American history, which is stamped by the destruction of native peoples.[75] Regrets concerning the sale of Alaska are not only expressed by so-called nationalist authors, but can also be found among high-ranking officials with links to Arctic affairs.[76]

The broad dissemination of Aryan and neo-pagan themes in contemporary Russia (see Chapter 4) helps shape public opinion around the idea of the Arctic as Russia's destiny. The metanarrative of Arctism is thus well received in a society marked by a growing xenophobia and identification as "whites."[77] Public discourse, fed by both politicians and the media, about "threats" coming from the South – including instability in the North Caucasus, migrations from Central Asia, and a fear (albeit declining) of Chinese "yellow peril" in Siberia and the Far East – contributes to reinforcing a spatial representation of Russia in which the South is the region from whence all danger issues, whereas the North is where the Russian nation will be able to take refuge and preserve itself. The growing Europeanization of identity narratives in Russia therefore opens new

niches for a Nordic, Arctist metanarrative to develop; a narrative competing with the more traditional Eurasianist one.

* * *

These three metanarratives – Eurasianism, Cosmism, Arctism – share several common traits. Their proponents were often trained within the same circles; they are neither former theoreticians of Marxism-Leninism nor former dissidents fighting for human rights. They were educated in the gray areas of the late Soviet regime, when nationalist-minded officials and academics, as well as some underground countercultural groups, were exchanging viewpoints and experiences. Some, like Dugin, have been able to successively or simultaneously handle all three metanarratives, a sign of his "catch-all" character and desire to shape the narrative on the Russian nation, whatever its doctrinal content.

These nationalist imaginaries are founded on resentment – the impression that Russia is disliked, maltreated, and insufficiently recognized for what it has offered and continues to offer the world. The spatial criteria have thus arisen as one of the last refuges of Russian nationalism. Russia may be demographically fragile, politically insecure, and surrounded by internal and external enemies, but its size and location guarantee its survival and renewal. These metanarratives carry the promise of better days ahead: the Eurasianist discourse transcends contemporary political boundaries to keep Eurasia under Russia's leadership; the Cosmist narrative projects Russia's grandeur into outer space; and the Arctist framing hopes to conquer the last swath of virgin land on the planet and expand Russian territory by doing away with climatic realities and technological limits. To varying degrees, they all epitomize the revenge of space over politics.

These metanarratives are not static, but dynamic. For instance, Eurasianism's focus on Russia's location between East and West, Asia and Europe, has been reframed by the discourse's partial recapture by the regime. Its paradigm is now centered on economic issues – Russia must seize the opportunity to work with its neighbors in the Asia-Pacific region and construct a Eurasian Economic Union. Meanwhile, its cultural arguments – the Slavic-Turkic, Orthodox-Islamic fusion – have been marginalized in favor of Arctic themes that reflect Russians' growing xenophobia toward "Muslims" and their self-projection as Europeans or "whites." These metanarratives borrow some of their assumptions from nineteenth-century thought, such as size as a marker of great-power status. But they are also updated to align with modernity. Eurasianism is presented as an example of multipolarity and regional economic integration; Cosmism has been rebranded by linking spatial conquest with Russia's need for modernization and high technology; and Arctism applies to both new quests for energy resources and the concern with preserving the planet's fragile ecosystems.

Geographical metanarratives are not the only ones shaping Russia's nationalist thinking – historical metanarratives, which extend Russia's past as far back as possible, are also part of this dynamic and innovative crafting of Russia's new imaginaries.

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3 Alternate history and New Chronology

Rewriting Russia's past[1]

History offers an immense space for re-imagining the nation, its roots, and therefore its legitimacy. It can also be conflated with fiction and develop in the peripheral spaces of para- or pseudo-science, as alternate history. This domain includes the paranormal, especially the study of parallel worlds and the mysteries of ancient civilizations, the analysis of history "that did not happen," and para-academic texts that claim to represent alternate scholarship. While some authors address these alternative histories as products of the imagination and label them as fiction, others set themselves in direct opposition to what they denounce as "official scholarship" and hope to challenge the latter's very foundations. In Russia, the constant rewritings of Soviet history and the abrupt disappearance of the regime paved the way for attempts to undermine "conventional" history, often described as consensual, and to deny academic institutions the right to draw the line between truth and lies. Alternate historians contend that history must no longer remain in the hands of academic specialists, who always have an agenda, wittingly or otherwise; instead, it must be made by non-professionals, often those who have a background in the hard sciences.

The feeling that the limits on writing history imposed by social conventions and institutions were open to challenge worked to reinforce the need to find explanations for the traumatic events linked to the collapse of the Soviet Union. The sudden disappearance of the state, its ideology, and its borders, coupled with drastic cultural and social developments, have created an atmosphere of suspicion toward politics and triggered the desire in people to learn about those who are "pulling the strings" in international relations, especially in the new "world order." The decline of the Marxist metanarrative has generated new interpretative frames, including the notions that no single explanation is legitimate and that a permanent hidden conflict has been organized against Russia by an alliance of internal and external enemies. Alternate history thus articulates closely with conspiracy theories.[2] Already in robust health prior to the fall of the USSR, they have become even more fashionable in the post-Cold War era, as a means to explain international affairs and rewrite national history.

This focus on history as a means of understanding the present has also been exacerbated by the "memory wars" into which the post-Communist states have rushed headlong, notably over the interpretation of World War II – the Soviet

Union is rejected by the states of Central and Eastern Europe as a totalitarianism equal to Nazism.[3] Then-Russian President Dmitri Medvedev created a commission to tackle the falsification of history in 2009, an effort that confirmed the importance with which the Russian state, with support from public opinion, imbues this search for the "true," "authentic" history that ought to be protected against the "falsifications" organized by political forces that seek to undermine Russia's international legitimacy.[4] While the Russian state struggles to protect its reading of Soviet history against any form of "revisionism," a huge and commercially profitable market of nationalist alternate histories has emerged, invading bookstores and highlighting the society's thirst for non-conventional narratives about Russia's great past.

Can history be fiction? Alternate history as commercial success

In the Soviet Union, the idea of a possible alternative to the official discourse has always lurked under the surface, driven by individual and collective memories of the old Bolsheviks liquidated by Stalin, by the *zek* (prisoner) culture that emerged as political prisoners began to return from the camps in the 1950s, and then by means of the *samizdat* works that were reproduced and distributed by dissidents and exiles between the 1960s and 1980s. The continual reversals of official historiography, in which past heroes were erased and replaced with the new men in power, played a fundamental role in forming the general impression that scholarship served temporary political objectives and that its relation to the "truth" was random.[5] The Russian public has become accustomed to hearing about the latest reversals of historical perspectives at regular intervals; this schizophrenia has facilitated the massive establishment of alternate history in contemporary Russia, where people experienced the collapse of the Soviet Union and the birth of new states as something imposed from both without and within. Instead of providing a rational reading of the collapse, a large part of the Russian elite, including Yeltsinian liberals, did not hesitate to use the conspiracy framework to legitimize undemocratic practices.[6]

Added to this is the old tradition of false tsars and political mystics that runs through Russian history, used by people to express their discontent at an autocratic regime.[7] It is also worth adding that Russian historiography has been rife with debates about the dating of Church Chronicles or manuscripts like the *Igor Tale* ever since its modern constitution in the second half of the eighteenth century. In some manuscripts, added elements were probably of later provenance than the date that accompanies them in the text, thus casting doubt on versions of history that assumed them to be contemporaneous and consequently accurate. The Normanist polemic, which opposed supporters of two contradictory interpretations of the birth of the first Russian state (were the first people described as Rus' ethnically Slav or Scandinavian? Were the first state structures indigenous or foreign?), lasted throughout the entire nineteenth century and extended into the Soviet period, when Communist historiography opted for a patriotic reading of that founding event.[8]

Similarly, in the nineteenth century, the Slavophile historiographical school fought to insist on Slavicizing the peoples of the steppe, from the Scythes to Attila, in order to minimize the impact of the Finno-Ugrian and Turkic peoples on the constitution of the Russian nation.[9] The famous debates over the interpretation of the "Mongol yoke" and its role in engendering Russia's "backwardness" relative to Europe also contributed to turning historical narratives into mirrors of contemporary debates on Russian identity and the relationship to Europe.[10] One of the successes of alternate historians has thus been to use conventional historiographical debates by stripping them from their roots and presenting them as "proof" of the accuracy of their conspiracy theories.

In Russia today, alternate history covers a large variety of publications, with the paranormal dominating the pack. Many books are devoted to the mysteries of ancient civilizations, from Egyptians to Native Americans.[11] An entire field dubbed "Atlantology" has also developed in an attempt to prove that the mythical continent of Atlantis was located in Russia, an effort partly based on the fact that this myth was an important element of the writings of great poets such as Dmitrii Merezhkovskii (1865–1941), Viacheslav Ivanov (1866–1949), Konstantin Balmont (1867–1942), and Valeri Briusov (1873–1924).[12] As in the West, the best-known theories are those about unidentified flying objects. A "Laboratory of Alternate History," one of the major Russian websites on the topic, founded by Andrei Skliarov, rejects, for instance, the idea that science can demonstrate the truth of history and recognizes another, equally legitimate version based on the belief that extraterrestrial civilizations influenced the development of humanity.[13]

The rewriting of national and world history is the second major domain of alternate history. The first texts to refer to alternate history as a discipline were published at the beginning of perestroika (1986) in the academic journal *Istoriia SSSR*. In these texts, the mathematician Ivan D. Koval'chenko (1923–1995), one of the founders of the Soviet quantitative school, discusses the relationship between history and mathematics and encourages the social sciences to draw greater inspiration from the methods of the hard sciences.[14] But the popularity of Koval'chenko's theories came later, with the liberalization of memory made possible by the democratization of historical debates. In 1988, the official rehabilitation by Mikhail Gorbachev of one of Stalin's most famous opponents, Nikolai Bukharin (1888–1938), who was liquidated during the show trials, suddenly popularized a vision of an alternate reading of the Soviet Union in which Stalin would not have occupied a prominent role, collectivization would have been avoided, and the Communist leadership would have been more collegial. Debates concerning the weight of the Revolutions of 1905 and February 1917 in Russia's destiny, a new place granted to Orthodoxy as well as to the last tsar, Nicholas II, and the reissuing of the works of the great philosophers from the Silver Age contributed to a newly positive assessment of the last decades of the Tsarist regime and its attempts at modernization.[15]

The rehabilitation of Piotr Stolypin (1862–1911), the symbol of Russian capitalism at the beginning of the twentieth century, allowed Koval'chenko to go

further in his reflections on a history of "what if." In an article on "Stolypin's Agrarian Reform: Myths and Reality" (1991), he modeled three paths of development that Russia could have taken had the October Revolution not occurred.[16] In his three volumes of *The Red Wheel* (*Krasnoe koleso*), republished in Russia at the beginning of the 1990s, Alexander Solzhenitsyn (1918–2008) also encouraged his fellow citizens to think about what would have become of Russia had Nicholas II not gone to war against the German Empire and had therefore avoided the Bolshevik Revolution: without violence, Russia might have continued on its path of modernization and become part of the concert of "civilized nations."[17] This nostalgia for the early days of Bolshevism as represented by Bukharin, or for the Tsarism of the early twentieth century as embodied by Stolypin, paved the way for alternative works that are much larger and more ambitious in their attempts to undermine the postulates of professional history.

Since the increased freedom of speech and privatization of the publishing market, now subject to commercial demands of profitability, books devoted to conspiracy theories against Russia, secrets of world history, or undisclosed negotiations between major world leaders – from Alexander the Great and Napoleon to Hitler, Stalin, and Mao – have become legion and are almost guaranteed to be bestsellers. Key moments of national history have been opened to counter-factual musings: what if Prince Vladimir had refused Christianization in 988? What if Novgorod had won its power competition with Moscow, or if Russia had transformed the Golden Horde into an ally? Could Ivan the Terrible have instituted a democratic system? What if there had never been a Time of Troubles or if the reigns of Romanov rulers like Peter the Great and Catherine II had taken different directions?[18]

Within this constellation, literature dedicated to the rise of the Communist regime predominates: *The Alternate History of the Twentieth Century: The Victory of the Counter-Revolution in Russia in 1917* by Dmitrii Andreev is a classic in a genre that imagines the failure of the Bolsheviks.[19] *The Last Empire* by Evgenii Sartinov conjures up a virtual reorganization of the world by Stalin.[20] *Alternative I* by Vladimir Mikhailov envisions the restoration of Tsarism via the Russian secret services, and *The Icon*, a translation from the British author Frederick Forsyth, imagines the return of the monarchy after the sudden death of the first Russian president.[21] In *Fury*, Iurii Nikitin sketches a Russia that has converted to Islam and made NATO its number-one enemy.[22] *Lenin Lived, Lenin Lives* by Aleksandr Shubin rewrites the future of the country as if Lenin had not died in 1924 but had decades to shape the new Soviet state.[23] Alternate military histories are also extremely widespread. Two websites, Militera and Alternatiwa,[24] display texts related to military history based on archival records, stories, and propaganda and offer readers the chance to "live" alternate versions of military events that occurred during the wars against the Ottoman Empire, the Russo-Japanese War, World War I, and, above all, World War II. They ask what would have occurred if the non-aggression pact with Germany had not been signed in 1939, if Hitler or Stalin had died during the conflict, if Turkey had allied with the Soviet Union, if the Nazis had won the battle of Stalingrad, or if the second front had opened earlier.

Alternate anti-Semitic history: the classic pattern of Jewish conspiracy

One of the most widespread alternatives of national and world history is linked to the "Jewish question." Since the nineteenth century, anti-Semitism has often been founded on the argument that the Jews are involved in a global plot against the Christian world and, since Israel's birth in 1948, against the Muslim world. Especially in Russia, alternate history is one of the main driving forces behind the spread of anti-Semitic texts, as are the paintings of Ilia Glazunov (1930–2017) in the aesthetic domain.[25] The infamous *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* is sold in the main bookstores of every large city in editions with commentary.[26] The evils of "world Jewry" (*mirovoe evreistvo*), the Judeo-Masonic alliance (*zhidomasonstvo*), and the "secret history of Israel" also feature prominently on the shelves of Russian bookstores.

The alternate history devoted to Stalin often fits this anti-Semitic bill. It claims that the Soviet leader managed to defeat the conspiracy of many Bolsheviks, whose Jewishness would be revealed by the use of double surnames (Bronstein-Trotskii, Apelbaum-Zinoviev, Kamenev-Rosenfeld, and so on).[27] Ancient history is also reworked to promote anti-Semitic theories. For example, in his *Moses in Egypt*, Eduard Sedakov discusses possible historical variants to the story of Moses in which he does not become the greatest prophet of the Jews.[28] Alexander Solzhenitsyn's comments in one of his last books, *Two Hundred Years Together (1795–1995) (Dvesti let vmeste, 1795–1995)*, have increased the visibility of anti-Semitic speech in Russia, whatever the writer's intentions may have been.[29]

Alternate history provides prominent Russian nationalist essayists, such as Aleksandr Prokhanov (1938), Sergei Kurginian (1949), Vadim Kozhinov (1930–2001), Igor' Shafarevich (1923–2017), and Sergei Kara-Murza (1939), with a vast platform from which to claim that Russia's past was threatened by Jews and its future will be likewise. Their alternate histories repeat allegations about the existence, since ancient times, of an a-historical Jewish desire to harm Russia, and they "demonstrate" this by focusing specifically on Khazaria.[30] The Khazar Kingdom, established on the shores of the Caspian Sea between the eighth and tenth centuries, was an important regional power of its day, dominating Kievan Rus' and thwarting Muslim expansion in the region. Since its elites had converted to Judaism, Khazaria is a ripe topic for historical reinterpretations, both philo-Semitic and anti-Semitic.[31] In 2002, the essayist and mathematician Shafarevich published a second, expanded version of his famous pamphlet *Russophobia*, which had established him as a major nationalist doctrinaire, in a book titled *A 3,000 Year Old Mystery: A Contemporary Russian View of Jewish History*.[32] He supplemented his denunciation of the Jewish revolutionary tradition with commentary on the specific role of Jews in ancient empires and especially the Khazar Kingdom's role in combating the rise of Kievan Rus'. The most radical authors of Soviet "Zionology" (*sionologiia*) from the 1960s and 1970s, Valerii Skurlatov (1938), Valerii Emel'ianov (1929–1999), Evgenii

Evseev (1932–1990), and Vladimir Begun (1929–1989), are also being widely republished.[33] Anti-Semitic alternate history can even become science fiction: Prokhanov's *Mr Hexogen*, which received the National Bestseller literary prize in 2002, envisions a futuristic Moscow in apocalyptic terms that are more or less directly inspired by the *Protocols*.[34]

For his part, the famous literary critic Vadim Kozhinov (1930–2001) became the herald of an alternate rewriting of the Russian people's centuries-long struggle to defend its rights. In his *Truth about the Black Hundreds*, published posthumously in 2006, he argues that the far-right movement Black Hundreds (*Chernaia sotnia*), created during the Revolution of 1905 and dissolved in February 1917,[35] encompasses all the manifestations of Russian national defense, from the Battle of Kulikovo in 1380, when the Golden Horde was defeated, to the heroic actions of Minin and Pozharskii in 1612 during the siege of Moscow by the Polish-Lithuanian *Rzeczpospolita*. In his view, the notion of Black Hundreds should not be limited to a precise time of history, but should rather be understood as a genealogy of conservative defenders of Russian values against all categories of enemies, from the Mongols to the Communists.[36] Kozhinov was also interested in Khazaria and what he saw as its primordial opposition to Russia. In his *History of the Rus' and the Russian Word*, he tried to prove that all major medieval Russian texts that presented conflicts between Russian princes and the Tatars were rewritten or unfairly interpreted, as in actual fact they described the conflict with the Jewish Khazars. This element, he alleged, was erased from the records by those who sought to transform the Tatars into an enemy of Russia and to conceal the fact that the real historical combat was with the Jewish world.[37]

Jews also occupy a large place in the realm of literary fiction. Even the best-known authors of Russian detective novels – like Aleksandra Marinina and Boris Akunin, neither of whom can be accused of anti-Semitism – have given the Jewish characters in their novels ambiguous attributes, often inspired by the image of the Jewish oligarch who made his fortune in a less-than-legal manner.[38] While alternate history in Western Europe and the United States is often – but not always – devoid of nationalist pretexts (but not of anti-Semitism), this is not the case in Russia. Allusions to mysterious or parallel worlds that could have existed on Russian territory are often influenced by claims about the superiority of Russian civilization. The majority of the books that explore hypothetical political regime change are based on the idea of a Jewish conspiracy against Russia, whether this is expressed explicitly or only implied. Even when anti-Semitism is not inherent, primordialist statements of a-temporal national or ethnic identities, coupled with the idea of conspiracy, tend to essentialize the opposition between peoples and construct an image of Russia as surrounded by enemies.

A textbook of alternate history: Fomenko's New Chronology

The archetype of Russia's alternate history is probably the "New Chronology" movement. It was founded by Anatolii Fomenko (1945), a mathematician

working at Moscow State University and the Academy of Sciences, and his colleague Gleb Nosovskii (1958), a physicist. Just behind them in influence are detective and fantasy writer Aleksandr Bushkov, whose main work, *The Russia that Did Not Exist*, analyzes the trajectory of the country if it had converted to Catholicism or Islam, and Aleksandr Guts, whose *True History of Russia: Models for a Multiversioned History* claims that the Mongols were actually Cossacks.[39] In addition to this quartet, a larger group inspired by the New Chronology has also contributed to developing this editorial niche.[40] The movement has reached Bulgaria, where mathematician Iordan Tabov at the Academy of Sciences in Sofia has published a "new timeline" of the Balkans, questioning the historical existence of Ottoman domination over the region.[41] Despite the increasing number of authors, Fomenko still dominates the field and the New Chronology theory is associated with his name.

Fomenko began publishing articles on the use of mathematics, statistics, and probability theory to calculate chronology in the early 1980s. However, the party's Central Committee ruled that his notions did not correspond to Marxist-Leninist norms, and he was unable to publish his main monograph before the fall of the Soviet regime.[42] Early in the 1990s, prestigious academic publishers associated with Moscow State University and the Academy of Sciences, such as Nauka, began to print his books. Commercial success was rapid, and the movement subsequently developed a website, began publishing a biannual journal, and produced many television shows.[43] New Chronology works have often been published in runs of 10,000 copies. Fomenko claimed to have sold a total of 300,000 copies of his work by 2007, a figure that confirms the popular demand for alternate history.[44] The movement has also benefited from the support of respected personalities. In 2001, sociologist and philosopher Aleksandr Zinoviev (1922–2006) returned from exile and agreed to write the preface for one of Fomenko's publications.[45] Former chess champion turned opposition politician Garry Kasparov (1963) has also written several articles praising Fomenko, as well as a preface to one of his books.[46]

Conventional historians were caught completely off-guard by these bestsellers, and it took several years for them to respond with "anti-Fomenko" works.[47] For some historians, New Chronology is to history as creationism is to Darwinism: that is, it is not worth even acknowledging. However, academic silence is hard to justify when the Academy of Sciences and Moscow State University have agreed to publish Fomenko's theories. Faced with the magnitude of the phenomenon, in 1999 the Academy of Sciences organized a conference devoted to New Chronology, and several historians decided to respond to its arguments point-by-point, giving birth to an "anti-Fomenko" series that includes a dozen volumes in which historians, archaeologists, and linguists, as well as mathematicians, physicists, and astronomers, categorically disprove Fomenko's theses, whether by questioning his calculation methods, disputing his idea of historical duplication, or offering historical perspectives on the errors in the ancient and medieval texts he denounces.[48] In the face of this offensive, supporters of Fomenko did not hesitate to refer to the regular political reversals of Soviet

historiography to challenge the right of "conventional scholarship" to determine the authenticity of historical interpretations. Moreover, the New Chronologists claim that they practice a hard science that legitimately belongs to mathematics, and that people who receive training only in the humanities and social sciences are unable to grasp the great scientific complexity of their analyses.

Fomenko's interest in rewriting history began in the 1970s after he read articles on the discovery, by US astronomer Robert Newton (1918–1991), of errors in old astronomical tables and irregularities in the speed of the moon. He then turned to the works of Nikolai Morozov (1854–1946), a Russian encyclopaedist who criticized the chronology of the father of the Julian calendar, Joseph Justus Scaliger (1540–1609), and in the 1920s published a study of early Christianity that denied that Jesus had even existed.[49] According to Fomenko, conventional historians are conformist, never question ancient chronology, and pursue a distorted order of events – some unwittingly and others intentionally – in order to deny Russia its power. According to his calculations, based on Ptolemy's *Almagest* and the use of computer capacities in probability theory, it is possible to solve astronomical irregularities. He states that there were two major "jumps" in chronology, one in the fourth century and the second in the eleventh century. With historical texts no longer falsified, it would therefore be necessary to go back several hundred years to find out the exact century in which we live. To find the correct starting point, Fomenko has developed complex statistical methods to measure the correlations not only between historical events and how they relate across manuscripts, dynasties, and major historical actors, but also between astronomical events such as eclipses, which should enable us to determine whether a particular event or actor is actually a duplicate of another.[50]

According to Fomenko, the timeline of mankind is shorter than conventionally thought, since prehistory did not begin until the ninth century CE, putting the life of Jesus Christ in the early eleventh century, a lag of a millennium. The first Christian millennium is thus purported to be an invention of the late Renaissance, as are a number of events that took place in the Middle Ages. In Fomenko's theories, the New Testament was written before the Old Testament; ancient history becomes a duplicate of medieval history, which itself is a duplicate of modern times; the Bible describes events that occurred during the eleventh century; and all that conventionally occurred from the tenth to the thirteenth century in fact took place between the thirteenth and seventeenth centuries. This revised reading of ancient and medieval history leads to the assertion of the existence of duplicate or even triplicate events. Thus, the Roman Empire was actually the Holy Roman Empire, Jerusalem was Christian Constantinople, the land of Israel described in the Old Testament was located in the Western Roman Empire, Ancient Greece was pre-Ottoman medieval Greece, and so on. Historical figures are also duplicated: Emperor Diocletian was actually both Constantine and Ivan the Terrible; and Jesus Christ himself has 50 reflections across history.[51]

Many New Chronology works deal with world history, especially the ancient empires of Egypt, Greece, Rome, and China, and Western Europe from medieval

times up to the Age of Exploration. It is Russia, however, that lies at the heart of Fomenko's enterprise: the ultimate goal of the New Chronology is to demonstrate that the Catholic Church and Western countries have for centuries used conventional historiography to deny Russia its political greatness and geographic reach.

According to Fomenko and Nosovskii, the Romanovs attained power through a *coup d'état*, constantly sought to rewrite Russian history in order to legitimize their dynasty, and divided the peoples of the Eurasian space in order to cement their autocratic rule. To do so, they came to an agreement with the Orthodox Church – directly targeted by Fomenko, whom the Moscow Patriarchate accused of anti-Christianism in several publications – but also with the Catholic Church and the Germanic historians who then dominated Russian universities and the Academy of Sciences. The latter historians allegedly destroyed original documents attesting to the truth of Russian history, created new manuscripts from scratch, and falsified the chronologies. The plot was therefore one of global proportions. It began in the seventeenth century, and it unified Western countries and Tsarist leaders for more than three centuries around a single goal, namely undermining the value of the Russian people, which is said by Fomenko to have been at the origin of all the great advances in the ancient, medieval, and modern worlds, from the Etruscans to Columbus and the discovery of America.

Even if the mathematical tables accompanying their works present themselves as a new method, the theories advanced by Fomenko and Nosovskii are not at all original, except perhaps for their radicalism. On the contrary, they are part of longstanding historiographical lines of thought. The New Chronologists have for instance rehabilitated arguments that Mikhail Lomonosov advanced in his battles against Normanist theory. Lomonosov is hailed as being the first to have had the courage to denounce an alleged Russophobic plot denying the autonomy of the first Russian state created by Riurik. They also reprise for their own purposes the Slavophile historiography, which maintained the Slavicness of all the great ancient peoples, from the Etruscans to the Hittites, as well as the peoples of the steppe, from Attila to Genghis Khan, with the aid of outdated historical and philological interpretations.[52] Like the Eurasianists of the 1920s–1930s and Lev Gumilev later, the New Chronology rejects the notion that Russia was once under the Tatar yoke.[53] Finally, it draws inspiration from Aryanist theories and from the *Book of Veles*, presented as one of the only manuscripts to have escaped the plotters' destruction, and it believes in the existence of the ancient Slavic civilization of Arkaim (see Chapter 4).

As for the Mongol Empire, which forms a major part of Fomenko's historical reconstruction, it is restored not only because it saved the principality of Moscow from Teutonic domination, but also because it is considered to be an intrinsic part of Russia. According to proponents of the New Chronology, the Mongol invasion never occurred, but is rather a myth created by Church chroniclers. On the contrary, Mongolians and Russians formed a single people; Khazars, Pechenegs, and Polovtsy were allegedly all Slavs; "khan" and "tsar" were homonyms. The Tatar yoke is purported to have actually been no more than a civil

war between different factions of the Russian state at the time. The New Chronology thus outlines an immense Russian state called the Russian Horde (*russkaia orda*), which stretched from Hungary to China and existed throughout the whole second millennium of our era. The merging of historical figures erases any supposed conflict between the Russian princes and Tatar khans: Aleksandr Nevskii was also Khan Berke of the Golden Horde, Dmitrii Donskoi was his enemy Khan Toktamysh, and Prince Riurik, the founder of Novgorod in the ninth century, was both Genghis Khan and Moscow Prince Iurii Danilovich. The duplications are not only chronological but also geographical. For example, when Marco Polo visited the Mongol capital of Karakorum, he was in fact in Yaroslavl, a few hundred kilometers from Moscow. Kostroma, capital of the Russian Horde, is claimed to be the equivalent of ancient Khorezm, conventionally situated in the Amu Darya delta in Central Asia – and the famous Battle of Kulikovo in 1380 was in fact fought in Moscow itself.

In addition, Fomenko and his followers claim that Ivan the Terrible was one of the great victims of this historiographical plot, another classic argument in Russian nationalist historiography. The "good" Ivan of the late 1540s–1550s is alleged to have been killed and replaced by the "bad" Ivan of the 1560s, who created the *oprichnina* – a repressive and blood-stained secret police apparatus often presented as a precursor to the Russian secret services. According to the New Chronology, the West fomented this dark moment of Russian history in order to liquidate those boyars loyal to the Russian Horde. Thereafter, Fomenko claims, the Romanovs created a historical composite "Ivan the Terrible" based on four different rulers in order to legitimate their *coup d'état*, which took place in the wake of a Time of Troubles that, he contends, never actually occurred.[54]

The chronological jumps proposed by Fomenko allow Russia to lay claim to the ancient Sumerian and Hittite civilizations, as well as to Egypt, ancient China, medieval Japan, the main Arab empires, the Ottoman Empire, and Christopher Columbus, who is presented as a Russian Cossack who, stationed in Spain, was on a secret mission for the tsar to conquer the New World. It is no coincidence that Fomenko reshapes the chronology especially of ancient times, when Russia did not exist, in such a way as to confine it to a medieval history during which Moscow could encroach on neighboring states and claim ownership of many historical events, including those described in the Old Testament.[55] But the New Chronology also has a geographical aspect: for Fomenko, Russia's greatness can be measured by the space that it occupies on the map. Hence the publication, after 2004, of several series of ancient maps corresponding to his theories. According to him, for instance, Ptolemy's maps prove the existence of a large Russian Empire that dominated Europe, the Middle East, and Asia.[56]

The New Chronology therefore depicts Russia as having long been the victim of a global conspiracy to deny its role in human history. Anti-Semitism, however, seems largely absent: Fomenko does not describe the Jews as the instigators of this plot, nor does he advance an anti-Semitic reading of Khazaria – which he in fact considers to have been peopled with Slavic Cossacks. That

being said, as Charles Halperin rightly remarks, he never speaks of Israel, but only of Palestine.[57]

Within this fantastical narrative, a visceral anti-Western sentiment is dominant. In Fomenko's vision of the world, the Vatican, the Holy Roman Empire, and the Germanophile Romanov dynasty fomented a historiographical conspiracy against the great Russian-Eurasian empire. Fomenko has thus customized the Eurasian tradition to suit his own purposes. He denounces the West, embodied by Germany, as Russia's fundamental enemy. He also calls for a pacification of memory toward Asia, an area with which conflict was only superficial or even a historical lie since, according to his logic, Russia could lay claim to Chinese and Japanese culture as its own. Nonetheless, he does not prop himself up on specific geopolitical theories and limits himself to hyperbolic depictions of Russia's territorial extension, drawing a catch-all Russian Empire that "swallows" world history. But Fomenko's narrative belies a highly political objective. It seeks to name the contemporary enemy – the West and liberalism – and identify Russia with Asia, but also to suggest the illegitimacy of the post-Soviet states. In the New Chronology, Belarus and Ukraine exist only as pieces of Russian history, just as the Turkic peoples of the Russian Federation and Central Asia have no history outside of a Russocentric framework.

* * *

A multiplicity of alternate and plural histories of Russia coexist under the general label of "alternate history." Each one has its own specific focus, in terms of its periods of predilection, its way of formulating the components of identity (religion, culture, state, and so on), and its designation of the enemy. However, nearly all of them share the idea that Russia is an empire by nature and destiny. The imperial vector, also very present in contemporary Russian science fiction, is indeed the driving force behind many nationalist brands of alternate history.[58] The Eurasianist feature of the New Chronology is not unique: a mythical Ordus, a vast Oriental empire, was also, for instance, at the core of the seven-book series *Eurasian Symphony* published by a collective pen name Kho'lm van Zaichik between 2000 and 2005 – a sign that the Eurasian motive may blend effortlessly with fictional history.[59]

This imperial reading of Russia goes well with conspiracy theories: only the latter seem able to explain why Russia has, since ancient times, been denied its chronological unity and its spatial vastness beyond the borders that are conventionally attributed to it. Only the idea of a plot and its presupposed secret manipulations provide interpretive grids to explain the sudden disappearance of the Soviet Union, which was equated with the empire. Similarly to their Aryan and anti-Semitic colleagues, the New Chronologists define the imperial structure as the fundamental element of Russian identity. The empire offers a perfect imaginary for an alternate Russia, while the conspirological framework makes it easier to articulate today's dramaturgy of the nation – the loss of the empire – in logical terms.

Although the New Chronology has failed to take root in academia, other nationalist historiographies have succeeded in indirectly influencing the university milieus, or at the very least have had some of their ideological articulations and thematic fetishes included in the domain of the academically correct, in particular in such new disciplines as culturology, geopolitics, ethno-politology, and so on. Nor have the classic disciplines been left intact; some places, like the Institute of Russian History of the Academy of Sciences or Moscow State University's Sociology Faculty, have a reputation for privileging "nationalist" scholarship. The boundaries between conventional and alternate narratives are therefore blurrier in today's Russia than they are in most Western countries: the weight of Soviet history and neoliberal violence of the 1990s have contributed to the delegitimization of official institutions and conventional discourses, which are furthermore accused of disciplinary elitism.

The Russian public, to whom these alternate histories are addressed, seems particularly sensitive to the postmodern question of personalizing the historical narrative: just like New Age spiritualism is in fashion today, so too is the right of each individual to create his own national and world history. It can therefore be postulated that there may exist a sociological link, a *habitus* in the Bourdieusian sense of the term, between these nationalist alternate histories and the former Soviet intelligentsia, those middle classes with a tertiary education whose social status, material as well as symbolic, has fallen apart, as analyzed by Serguei Oushakine in his seminal *Patriotism of Despair*.[60] In these histories, such individuals find a form of symbolic compensation for their loss of values, of status, and of *Weltanschauung*, as well as reassuring explanations which stage the individual and collective drama in an objective form. In reading alternate history, readers engage in a performative act, reproducing the prevailing ideological ideas of their social group.[61]

The readership of these histories is probably "postmodern" in its interpretation of them. Do readers really take Fomenko's New Chronology literally? What do they accept or reject? How much distance do they put between themselves and the theories advanced? Do readers understand Fomenko as scholarship or as fiction? Do they read his work out of curiosity? Does the Eastern European tradition of the absurd or the excessive help explain the market success of the New Chronology? Nationalist types of alternate history shed light on the fact that the national narrative does not always reflect rational or conventional stances, nor involve articulated argumentation. Indeed, conspiracy theories and the nationalist imaginary of a forgotten immemorial Russian Empire appeal to the public by merely playing with the historical imagination, a ploy that brings them close to fiction – or even to science fiction.

Notes

1 First published in 2012 as "Conspiracy and Alternate History in Russia: A Nationalist Equation for Success?" *The Russian Review* 71, no. 4: 565–580.

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of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003).

3 See Julie Fedor, Markku Kangaspuro, Jussi Lassila, and Tatiana Zhurzhenko, eds., *War and Memory in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus* (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); Maria Mälksoo, "The Memory Politics of Becoming European: The East European Subalterns and the Collective Memory of Europe," *European Journal of International Relations* 15, no. 4 (2009): 653–680; Maria Mälksoo, "Criminalizing Communism: Transnational Mnemopolitics in Europe," *International Political Sociology* 8, no. 1 (2014): 82–99.

4 Maria Mälksoo, "In Search of a Modern Mnemonic Narrative of Communism: Russia's Mnemopolitical Mimesis during the Medvedev Presidency," *Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society* 1, no. 2 (2015): 317–339.

5 See, for example, the collection of falsified photos from the Stalinist period published by David King, *The Commissar Vanishes: The Falsification of Photographs and Art in Stalin's Russia* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1997).

6 Wilson, *Virtual Politics*.

7 Imposture or auto-nomination (*samozvanstvo*), which betokens a form of collective protest against central power, has existed in Russia since the seventeenth century (the False Dmitry) and lasted well into the twentieth century (the false Romanov children, the false Lenins, and so on). See Sergio Claudio Ingerflom, *Le Tsar, c'est moi – L'imposture permanente: d'Ivan le Terrible à Vladimir Poutine* (Paris: PUF, 2015).

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11 See their websites, http://alternatiwa.org.ru/ and www.arus.boom.ru/.

12 See, for example, the journal *Atlantida* 1 (2001), published in Moscow and edited by Aleksandr Voronin, who is attempting to constitute a reference domain called "Atlantology"; and Oleg Stoliarov, "Atlantida v kontekste russkoi literatury XX veka," www.lah.ru/text/stolyarov/atl.htm.

13 Andrei Skliarov, "Tseli i zadachi proekta Laboratorii Alternativnoi Istorii," www.lah.ru/cel.htm.

14 I.D. Koval'chenko, "Vozmozhnoe i deistvitel'noe i problemy alternativnosti v istoricheskom razvitii," *Istoriia SSSR* 4 (1986): 83–104.

15 Mainly Vasilii Rozanov, Vladimir Solov'ev, Nikolai Fiodorov, Dmitri Merezhkovskii, Nikolai Berdiaev, Father Sergei Bulgakov, and Father Petr Florenskii.

16 I.D. Koval'chenko, "Stolypinskaia agrarnaia reforma: mify i real'nost,'" *Istoriia SSSR* 2 (1991): 52–72, www.hrono.info/statii/2006/kov_srolyp.php.

17 See especially Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn, *Avgust chetyrnadtsatogo* (Paris: YMCA Press, 1971), the first volume of "The Red Wheel," a cycle of novels exploring the last years of Tsarist Russia. For the most recent English translation see Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *August 1914*, trans. H.T. Willetts (New York: The Bodley Head, 1989).

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22 Iurii Nikitin, *Iarost'*, www.fenzin.org/book/9548.
23 Aleksandr Shubin, *Lenin zhil, Lenin zhiv*, http://litresp.ru/chitat/ru/Ш/shubin-aleksandr-vladlenovich/lenin-zhil-lenin-zhiv.
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Part II

Nationalism as doctrine

Experimenting with new repertoires

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4 Beyond Slavophilism

The rise of Aryanism and neo-paganism[1]

Slavophilism, Pan-Slavism, and Eurasianism are probably the most well-known and well-studied ideologies on Russia's "uniqueness." Because the first two insist on Russia's Slavic identity and solidarity with its Slavic brothers, and the third on Russia's Eurasian destiny, all are seen as fostering the country's *Sonderweg* away from Europe. But this is a misleading conclusion: even if Slavophilism and Pan-Slavism condemn the Romano-Germanic world, they believe that Russia embodies the authentic Europe – the Byzantine one. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, another doctrinal attempt to advocate for Russia's full identification with Europe has developed, that of Aryanism.

The Aryan identity posited for Russia is not new – the Slavophile school also presumes Russia's Aryan origin, yet subordinates it to the Byzantine legacy – but it gained visibility in contemporary Russia.[2] As in many European countries, the broad feeling in Russian society of belonging to a pan-European, "white" identity that is threatened by what is seen as an uncontrolled flow of migrants or colored people gives a societal bedrock to this ideology. The slight treatment of the ideological foundations of the Nazi regime and the Holocaust in the Russian educational system results in the general public having scant awareness of the doctrinal roots of any reference to "Aryanness." Moreover, the interest in Slavic prehistory, as well as the trend of alternative history discussed previously, create an intellectual atmosphere favorable to the search for the "essences" of peoples, thereby contributing to a revival of old forms of racism.

This Aryan identity may have – but not systematically – a religious collorary, that of neo-paganism. As in Western Europe, many "new religious movements" have developed in Russia over the past three decades. Alternative spiritualities, Eastern religions, esotericism, occultism, astrology, and research on aliens first became fashionable among Soviet urban elites in the 1970s; alternative therapies and holistic medicine have also blossomed. Similar to Germany, Scandinavia, England, Ireland, and France, as well as the United States, groups inspired by New Age movements such as Wicca, Druidism, Heathens, Tolkienism, and Satanism have appeared on the Russian religious scene.[3] Among these, the *Rodnoverie* (ethnic faith or Mother Faith) movement, which seeks to restore the pre-Christian religion of the Slavs, has benefited from the simultaneous search for spirituality and the paranormal with the rediscovery of ancient Russian traditions

and folklore: it calls on followers to interact with Mother Earth and her gods, but also to find their place among ancestors and therefore preserve a pure Russian ethnic identity.

The Soviet era: the unknown matrix of Aryanism and neo-paganism?

In the nineteenth century, Slavophile movements borrowed from their German counterparts the idea of the prestigious Aryan origin of the European peoples. The father of Slavophilism, Aleksei Khomiakov (1804–1860), and several of his disciples, such as Alexander Hilferding (1831–1872), Dmitrii Ilovaiskii (1832–1920), and Ivan Zabelin (1820–1908), did not hesitate to make the claim that Russians constituted one of the most important branches of the Aryan family, if not its most direct representatives. This Russian-Aryan myth did not have a neo-pagan orientation, as Orthodoxy remained the primary religious influence for these nationalist intellectuals. They claimed that Byzantium had received the Christian message directly from the Asian cradle of the Aryan peoples, located in Central Asia or Iran. The maintenance of a biblical reference allowed them to dissociate Aryanism and anti-Semitism. Unlike their German colleagues, Slavophile claims of Aryan identity did not focus on the Jews as a "constituent Other" or question the theological bonds between Christianity and Judaism.

None of the far-right movements that emerged in Russia after the 1905 Revolution sought to rehabilitate a national pre-Christian faith, unlike the Ariosophy movements advocated at that same time in Germany and Austria.[4] It was not until the interwar emigration that skepticism about the primacy of Orthodoxy emerged among some Russian nationalist circles, inspired by the neo-paganism in vogue in Nazi Germany. After the war, the émigré newspaper *Zhar-Ptitsa*, published in the 1950s in San Francisco, was the first to venture into a neo-pagan agenda. It declared that there exists a manuscript supposedly dated from the first centuries CE that described the authentic faith of the pre-Christian Slavs, the *Book of Veles* (*Vlesova kniga*). A White Army officer, Fiodor A. Izenbek (1890–1941), supposedly discovered the book during the civil war, but the original wooden boards on which the text would have been written were lost during World War II. However, one of Izenbek's friends, Iurii P. Miroliubov (1892–1970), allegedly had time to study and copy them before they disappeared. Miroliubov, who probably forged this manuscript, was the first to use the word "Vedism" to describe this neo-paganism and to enrich it by appropriating the prestigious Indian filiation of the Vedas.[5] As early as the 1960s, the *Book of Veles* came to be considered an authentic manuscript not only by nationalist Russian émigrés, but also by some exiled Ukrainians, particularly those who closely followed Sergei Lesnoi (1894–1967), another great propagandist of neo-paganism. Despite the absence of an original manuscript, neo-pagan sympathizers consider the *Book of Veles* to be an unquestionable historical source of Slavic antiquity, as well as a book of prayers and hymns to ancient gods that could be put into practice.

In the Soviet Union itself, the rebirth of Russian nationalism, supported by Stalin from the second half of the 1930s onward,[6] indirectly contributed to the consolidation of neo-pagan discourses. Indeed, Stalin took a keen interest in research on Slavic antiquity and hoped that such research would help the Soviet regime demonstrate the primeval communism of Russians. The academician and former head of the Institute of Archaeology Boris Rybakov (1908–2001) provided the first academic arguments for neo-paganism. As with several other Soviet authors, he promoted a vision of pre-Christian religion that favored a communitarian conception of society and denounced Christianity for accepting justifications for class division.[7] The Soviet authorities recognized the central role Rybakov played in this rehabilitation of ancient paganism: he received the Stalin prize for his book *Craft Industry in Ancient Russia* (*Remeslo drevnei Rusi*) in 1949. Moreover, the Aryan or Indo-European set of themes never completely disappeared from the Soviet scientific discourse. The Japhetic theories of Nicholas Marr (1864–1934) dominated parts of Soviet linguistic and archaeological research in the 1930s and 1940s.[8] In the 1970s, the linguists Viacheslav V. Ivanov (1929–2017) and Tamaz V. Gamkrelidze (1929) contributed to the revival of the debate on the proto-homeland of the Indo-Europeans, which many of their Soviet colleagues located between the Black and Caspian seas.

In the 1960s, the renewal of atheist activism organized by Nikita Khrushchev presupposed a rereading of certain pre-Christian or pre-Islamic traditions. After the plenary session of the Communist Party's Central Committee in June 1963, which called for a reinforcement of the struggle against religion, the party's ideological commission encouraged the creation of new, non-religious rituals using the ancient cults of nature.[9] For example, the Turkic-Iranian feast of spring, Noruz, which was condemned in the 1930s during the struggle against Islam, was rehabilitated as a pre-Islamic tradition. The same was done with the Russian feast of the summer solstice during the night of June 23–24, in addition to several other animistic or pagan rites. Furthermore, from the mid-1960s, some state and party organs, such as the Central Committee of the Komsomol, the Union of Soviet Writers, and the Russian Society for the Protection of History and Culture (VOOPIIK), undertook a discreet attempt to fuse Soviet ideology and Russian nationalism,[10] progressively rehabilitating both Orthodoxy and neo-paganism.

In the 1970s, these ideological re-compositions became more visible, probably with the tacit support of the KGB, which was searching for new doctrines that would help it maintain its control over Soviet society at a time when the legacy of Stalinist terror had dwindled.[11] According to Victor Shnirel'man, the first manifesto of Russian neo-paganism was the letter "Critical remarks by a Russian man on the patriotic newspaper *Veche*," published anonymously in 1973 by Valerii Emel'ianov, a Middle East expert, part of the "Zionology" group previously mentioned, and who was close to Khrushchev. As a result of this letter, *Veche* closed in 1974 and its editor, the famous Orthodox dissident Vladimir N. Osipov (1938), was arrested.[12] In this text, Emel'ianov explicitly declared that Christianity was nothing more than the expression of Jewish domination and that

it only served the interests of Zionism, an analysis that was highly disparaged in the Soviet propaganda of the time. He repeated these same arguments in his famous pamphlet *Dezionisation* (*Desionizatsiia*), which was published first in Arabic in a Syrian newspaper in 1979, then later in Paris. After publication, many copies of the text began to circulate underground in the USSR. In 1978, Vasilii D. Zakharchenko (1915–1999), chief editor of the newspaper *Tekhnika-molodezhi*, published one of the first articles on the question of the Aryan identity of the Russians, written by Valerii Skurlatov (1938), a trained physicist and a researcher at the Institute of Scientific Information in the Human Sciences (INION, Moscow) who had acquired his knowledge of the Germanic discourses of the interwar years while doing his doctoral research.

The Russian nationalist cadres' movement Pamiat, which emerged at the very beginning of the 1980s, also brought together personalities attracted to neo-paganism, such as Emel'ianov and Skurlatov. The latter published a violently anti-Semitic book, *Zionism and Apartheid* (*Sionizm i Aparteid*), and taught a course on "The criticism of the ideology of Zionism" at Patrice Lumumba People's Friendship University in Moscow. In 1982, Vladimir Chivilikhin (1928–1984), the author of the famous novel *Memory* (*Pamiat'*), which had provided the nationalist organization's name, explicitly proclaimed that Russians, "and not the Germans, are the ones who should be considered Aryans."[13] In 1983, Pamiat organized a meeting devoted to the *Book of Veles* headed by Skurlatov. It was not until 1984–1985, with the arrival of new leader Dmitrii Vasiliev (1945–2003), a disciple of the nationalist painter Ilia Glazunov, that the association would be appropriated by more traditional monarchist circles that favored Orthodoxy over neo-paganism.[14]

Official forms of a neo-pagan sensibility could also be found in some late Soviet academic circles. In 1980–1982, the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kulikovo, feverishly prepared for by the Soviet authorities, allowed many Russian nationalists to express their ideas under the guise of putting some of the Party's directives into practice.[15] According to them, the victory of Dmitri Donskoi was possible only through the Orthodox faith, which gave the nation the necessary moral strength to throw off the Mongol yoke. However, a few discordant voices drew attention to themselves. A few years later, in 1988, Apollon Kuzmin (1928–2004), leader of the neo-Slavophile historiography, claimed for instance in *The Fall of Perun* (*Padenie Peruna*) that the true Russian national faith was paganism and that Orthodoxy had led to a policy of subjection by the Mongols. Rybakov's later books, such as *The Paganism of the Ancient Slavs* (*Iazychestvo drevnikh slavian*, 1981) and *The Paganism of Ancient Russia* (*Iazychestvo drevnei Rusi*, 1988), as well as the literary writings of several important figures of the village prose (*derevenshchiki*) genre, such as the writer Petr Proskurin (1928–2001) and the poet Iurii Kuznetsov (1941–2003), all promoted a positive vision of Russian pre-Christian faith.

Revamping an old myth: Russia as the Aryan cradle

In the first years following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Aryan followers invested in several widely-circulated newspapers and journals that presented questionable scientific theories, such as *Istoki* (Sources), *Nauka i religiia* (Science and Religion), *Chudesa i prikliucheniia* (Miracles and Adventures), *Svet* (The World), and *Priroda i chelovek* (Nature and Man). In 1997, Moskva, the Moscow municipality television channel known for its conservative positions, broadcast a program devoted to the *Book of Veles*. In the late 1990s, references to the book could even be found in respected liberal newspapers, such as *Nezavisimaia gazeta* and *Moskovskii komsomolets*.[16] Best-selling authors on Aryan topics include Vladimir Shcherbakov, president of the "Muscovite Club of Secrets"; Valerii Diomin, a reserve lieutenant colonel of the Russian army from Novosibirsk; and the geophysicist Aleksandr Asov (1964). Asov has been analyzing the *Book of Veles* since the Soviet era,[17] and since then has published dozens of works on what he calls "Slavic Vedic knowledge," an eclectic combination of tales, legends, popular songs, and fake manuscripts through which he reconstructs the alleged pantheon of Russian gods.

In the 2000s, popular Aryan book series like "Secrets of the Russian Land" or "The Real History of the Russian People" became available not only in Moscow's major bookstores but also in the stalls of Orthodox churches and on the shelves of university and public libraries. Several professors, mainly in provincial universities, have professed their commitment to Vedic theories. Some are known for their links with the radical right, while others insist on the authenticity of the *Book of Veles* as offering historiographic "proof" of Russia's prestigious Aryan past.[18] In 2002, a well-known children's book series published a volume devoted to the Aryans; the principal author was Asov.[19] References to the *Book of Veles* can also be found in the journal *Prepodavanie istorii v shkole* (Teaching History at School), published by the Ministry of Education. Russian Vedism even has an official painter, Konstantin Vasiliev (1942–1976), whose museum in Moscow regularly hosts various neo-pagan cultural activities. In Moscow, the Museum of Russo-Etruscan Culture asserts the Slavic nature of the Etruscans, while the Museum of Prince Igor's Chronicle does not conceal its Aryan conceptions of Russian history.

Aryan theories have gained some popularity in Russian provinces. In the 1990s, the Institute for Vedic Culture, established first in Tyumen and then in Yekaterinburg, popularized a view of Siberia as the geographical heart of the Aryan continent. In 1997, a "Hyperborea mission" went to the Kola Peninsula to search for this primeval civilization of white men. These movements often benefit from the support of their respective city administrations. The best example is probably the Arkaim site, located in Chelyabinsk region, which became known as the Russian Stonehenge. Dating from the seventeenth century BCE, the site is particularly well preserved, but its legitimate archaeological value has been completely overshadowed by the New Age cult that has established itself there. Arkaim has been repackaged as the capital of an ancient

Russian-Aryan civilization, with some followers even insisting that Zarathustra lived there. Branded as "the city of the swastika," the site receives tens of thousands of curious visitors in search of esoteric neo-pagan mysticism and holistic medicine every year. The tourist draw has been so strong that the regional administration has even gotten into the game, emphasizing the exceptional nature of it as a place "connected" to higher powers.[20]

In this alternative historiography, Slavs are presented as the first people of humanity, who have existed for several thousand years, if not tens of thousands.[21] Sumerians, Hittites, Etruscans, and Egyptians are retrospectively considered to be Slavs; the Russians supposedly played a critical, but to this point unknown, role in the development of the ancient civilizations of the Mediterranean Basin.[22] Some ideologists state that the original Aryan homeland lies in the steppes of southern Russia, seeing in the Scythian world the matrix element of their identity.[23] Others are more directly inspired by German theories of a Nordic origin: the Aryan homeland would have been located in ancient Atlantis or Hyperborea, a bygone Nordic country the descendants of which managed to migrate to Russia.[24] A Russian version of Atlantis, Belovodie, or the Kingdom of White Water – an update of an eighteenth-century Old Believers tenet – expresses the belief in an ancient esoteric world that disappeared from the face of the Earth, but not from the memory of mankind.[25] However, unlike some readings of Atlantis, Belovodie did not vanish through any fault of its own (by its claim to control nature), but due to eschatological natural events. The proponents of the Nordic Aryan cradle are more radical in their racial conceptions than those promoting a Central Asian and Iranian cradle: they believe in the superiority of an original white race, of which the Russians would be the purest representatives. A famous Aryanist theoretician, Vladimir Danilov, stated, for instance, that Russia is destined to create a Fourth Reich, a new Aryan empire of global dimensions.[26]

In this Aryan worldview, the Christianization of Kievan Rus' by Prince Vladimir in 988 signaled the beginning of Russia's decadence. The subsequent millennium of Russian history is presented as the progressive domination of Jews over the Russian people and the country's enslavement by foreign interests: Christianity reinforced royal power, provided a theological justification for serfdom, and validated the forced Westernization of Russia under the Romanovs. The 1917 revolutions and the atheism of the Soviet regime are presented either as the outcome of submission to the Jews or as the beginning of the liberation of the Russian people from the "Jewish invader," depending on the author's stance on the Soviet experience. Aryanist ideologists professing neo-pagan views are divided in their relationship to the Russian Orthodox Church: some believe that the Moscow Patriarchate is but one element in a Judeo-Christian world plot to weaken Russia, others that Orthodoxy is the genuine continuation of Vedism and does not share so much with the other Christian confessions.

Russians as Aryans: the return of race theories

Far-right groups stepped into the Aryan breach very early during the perestroika years. The first to adopt Aryanism as their core ideological belief was the Society of the Magi, based in Leningrad and headed by Viktor Bezverkhii (1930–2000). A teacher in one of the naval schools in Leningrad, Bezverkhii has been clandestinely promoting theories of white racial domination and partial extermination of the Jews since the late 1970s. Kept under close surveillance by the KGB, which was concerned about his openly national socialist slogans, Bezverkhii was indicted for publishing a samizdat version of *Mein Kampf* in Russian. In 1990, the Society of the Magi transformed itself into the Union of the Veneds,[27] which later split into several groups but remained for quite some time the most structured and best-known neo-pagan group,[28] with a widely-circulated newspaper, *Rodnye prostory* (Native Spaces). In 2000, its chief editor, Vladimir Istarkhov, published *The Assault of the Russian Gods* (*Udar russkikh bogov*), an extremely anti-Semitic and anti-Christian book that has become famous in Russian neo-pagan circles.[29]

Several other groupuscules advanced a similar agenda based on an Aryanist credo. One is the Russian Party of Russia (*Russkaia partiia Rossii*), founded by cult figure Viktor Korchagin (1940), who is known for his numerous publications, including his famous *Catechism of a Jew in the USSR* (*Katekhizis evreia v SSSR*), the newspaper *Russkie vedomosti*, and the almanac *Rusich* (The Russian), all of which are full of anti-Semitic references and present Christianity as one of the elements of Jewish world domination.[30] Of the primary neo-pagan newspapers, the best-known in the 1990s was *Za russkoe delo* (For the Russian Cause), based in St. Petersburg. It published a special supplement, *Potaennoe* (Secret), devoted to research on the Slavs' Arctic homeland. Its two editors, Oleg Gusev and Roman Perin, created the national socialist-inspired Russian Labor Party of Russia (*Russkaia trudovaia partiia Rossii*), which the Ministry of Justice refused to register.

In the early 1990s, Hitler was an iconic figure for these Aryan groups. This was the case, for instance, with the Church of Nav, an openly neo-Nazi organization led by Ilia Lazarenko (1973) that celebrates Hitler's birthday on April 20.[31] Since then, however, the Church of Nav has gradually replaced the Nazi leader, whose image provokes deep aversion among the Russian public, with Stalin, a much more palatable figure for a Russian audience. In the early 2000s, Bezverkhii's Union of the Veneds likewise exchanged Hitler for Stalin as the greatest hero of the Aryan cause, moving closer to Ziuganov's Communist Party. The Union of Slavic Communities, the Congress of Pagan Communities, and the Movement for Russian Liberation likewise proposed merging neo-paganism and communism.

At the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the following decade, a small Aryan movement willing to combine Nazism and Stalinism and to reach out to the ruling elite, "The Internal Predictor of the USSR" (*Vnutrennii prediktor SSSR*), emerged. Its occultist approach to politics was unique; its members

asserted that they were descendants of ancient pagan priests and claimed to be able to decipher hidden meanings and to predict the future. In their texts, they called on the Kremlin to seal the country against any external influence and build on the combined experience of Nazism and Stalinism. The Predictor's texts allegedly circulated among some Duma and Federation Council parliamentary groups in 1996. Several members of Ziuganov's CPRF and Zhirinovsky's LDPR mentioned them, and Putin supposedly accessed them while he was head of the Federal Security Service (FSB).[32] Prediktor then launched the People's Movement for Theocracy (*Narodnoe dvizhenie k bogoderzhaviiu*), headed by General Konstantin Petrov (1945–2009). Prediktor ran in the 2003 legislative elections, receiving a paltry 1.3 percent of the vote. However, its main influence was not in electoral politics, but in lobbying state structures: some of its members worked as experts at the Duma Committee for Security and co-wrote reports for the Federation Council.[33]

Russian proponents of Aryanism have not offered any doctrinal innovations. They merely repeat, translate, and update the existing repertoires about the white race that have already been well developed in Europe and the United States. The most systematic group, more interested by race than by Aryanism per se, structured around the so-called school of raciology (*rasologiia*).[34] Its founders include Aleksandr Sevast'ianov (1954), the well-known neo-pagan, publicist, and chairman of the National Statist Party of Russia (*Natsional'no-derzhavnaia partiia Rossii*); Pavel Tulaev (1959), a journalist and advocate for a "Vedic Slavic-Russian civilization"; Vladimir Avdeev (1962), a member of the pagan community in Moscow;[35] and Anatolii Ivanov (1935), a member of the editorial committee of the nationalist weekly *Russkii vestnik*. They were organized around the website "White World" (*Belyi mir*), which hosted other websites for so-called white and Slavic audiences, and participated in Slavophile literary circles, particularly the International Fund for Writing and Slavic Culture[36] and the Writers' Union of Russia.[37]

They first published in the newspaper *Nasledie predkov* (The Heritage of Ancestors), a name that evoked Heinrich Himmler's Ahnenerbe,[38] before launching their own brand. In 1999, they started a book series, the "Library of Racial Thought" (*Biblioteka rasovoi mysli*), which has since published several contemporary Russian authors, but focuses mostly on Western works from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[39] In 2005, the collection was under investigation by Moscow's Office of the Procurator, but its publisher managed to convince a judge of its scientific character, allowing its editors to avoid a criminal investigation despite their repeated calls for pogroms.[40] The movement has also launched an online journal, *Atenei*, which publishes neo-pagan theories, naïve nationalist imagery, and old anti-Semitic texts (such as the Spanish dictator Franco's writings on Freemasonry). It defends the white world and the Slavic world and praises the eugenic policies of Nazi Germany.[41] Many of these works also pertain to Aryanism and place Russia at the center of all major ancient civilizations.[42]

The raciology movement developed European contacts with the French author Guillaume Faye (1949), a former member of the GRECE – the European New

Right's main school for cadres – who went back to a more traditional far-right narrative based on the notion of *Blut und Boden* (Blood and Soil).[43] Faye crafted the concept of a Eurosiberia spanning from Dublin to Vladivostok, that is, "the destiny space of European peoples eventually regrouped from the Atlantic to the Pacific, sealing the historical alliance of peninsular Europe, Central Europe and Russia."[44] This white Eurosiberia, excluding the non-Slavic regions of Russia and the former Soviet Union, and heavily criticizing the US and its supposedly pro-Muslim policy, appears in full tune with the raciology movement's world-view. The Russian group even established a small branch of Faye's movement, European Synergies, in Russia and developed contacts with another similar initiative, Terre et Peuple. In 2006, Guillaume Faye presented a paper on Russia's major historical role in the Euro-Siberian future at a conference organized by the White World association and website in Moscow.[45] In 2015, it was the turn of the American Jared Taylor (1951), main editor of *American Renaissance* (published as a journal since 1990 and a daily webzine since 2012), representing the American equivalent of the French Identitarians, to attend the Russian International Conservative Forum in St. Petersburg, which brought together many leaders of European far-right parties. Faye was also invited to speak at American Renaissance in 2016.[46] As we can see, in the case of the Identitarians, direct connections between Russians and Americans are minimal; shared resonances are made possible because both sides read some of the same European thinkers.

Raciology proponents have selectively and carelessly resurrected the ideas of their Western predecessors, with falsified citations and expedient elisions, a fact noted by Victor Shnirel'man on several occasions.[47] Defending polygenetic theories on the origin of man, they claim that the study of phenotype (craniology, phrenology, odontology, serology) allows individuals to be classified based on race, and that race determines the cultural and intellectual potential of each nation. Inspired by the French theoretician of race Arthur de Gobineau (1816–1882), they paint a picture of human history marked by degeneration, in which superior dolichocephalic races mixed with inferior brachycephalic ones. They refer to many Soviet writers who asserted the indigenous nature of the Slavic people, transforming these analyses into an affirmation of Russians' Aryanness, while dismissing Finno-Ugric and Siberian peoples – and obviously Jews – as inferior races. Yet their main assumed ideological genealogy remains Nazi *Rassenkunde*. The raciology school borrows from outdated Western narratives, but it also draws on certain traditions of Soviet ethnology – namely, the existence of a large school of physical anthropology and ethnic ontologization. Soviet ethnology was a science of the ethnos and ethnic processes that took the naturalness of the ethnos as a given rather than a construction, disparaged the idea of miscegenation, rejected holding multiple identities, and called for endogamous marital strategies able to preserve the "genetic foundation" (*genofond*) of populations.[48]

In the 2000s, the group registered its first, albeit limited, political gains. Andrei Saveliev (1962), the main lobbyist for raciology and Dmitrii Rogozin's right-hand man since the early 1990s, was appointed second-in-command of the

Rodina party in 2003. Saveliev became a member of the Duma Committee for Constitutional Legislation and State-Building and vice-chairman of the Duma Committee for CIS Affairs and Compatriot Relations. In 2004, he helped Vladimir Avdeev testify before the latter at a session devoted to race in contemporary world events.[49] He also worked to bring about a rapprochement between Rogozin and the Movement against Illegal Immigration (*Dvizhenie protiv nelegal'noi immigratsii*, DPNI). He appeared in public alongside the Movement's leader, Aleksandr Belov (1976), as the two men hoped to establish a new nationalist party to oppose the Kremlin. Saveliev evidently supported the 2006 Kondopoga ethnic pogrom (see Chapter 7) as an example of the "birth of a nation," and congratulated ethnic Russians on eventually organizing resistance to the migrant yoke.[50] That same year, he unsuccessfully pushed for a Duma vote on a law on "the communities of indigenous peoples of Russia," which would have transformed migrants into second-class citizens and defined ethnic Russians as the indigenous people of Russia, worthy of greater rights.[51] As a Duma member, Saveliev was allowed to sell his books and several other anti-Semitic works at the Duma's bookstore.[52] In 2005, he also played a critical role in Rodina's initiation of *The Letter of 500*, a petition by public figures and parliament members that called for a struggle against "world Jewish domination" and an investigation into Russian Jewish associations, accusing them of conducting extremist activities subject to Article 282 of the Penal Code.

Until recently, Saveliev has continued to co-direct the Library of Racial Thought, through which he has published many works, including *The Racial Meaning of the Russian Idea* (*Rasovyi smysl russkoi idei)* and *Image of the Enemy: Racial and Political Anthropology* (*Obraz vraga*. *Rasologiia i politicheskaia antropologiia*).[53] According to him, "Race greatly defines lifestyle, character, and individual psyche, imposing specific limits on will and judgment. This is why there are no boundaries between the social and the biological."[54] In one of his best-known essays, *The Last Century of the White World* (*Poslednii vek belogo mira*), published in 2004, he argues that white civilization, having lost its means to react since Europe's embrace of cultural relativism, will disappear under the repeated assaults of other races.[55] He claims that only Russia can rescue white civilization, as it enjoys a rate of racial purity higher than that of any other European nation. Saveliev thus encourages resistance through the implementation of a eugenist policy: stop migration, promote large families, preserve the Slavic gene pool, and avoid the degradation that comes from mixing with inferior races.

The raciology group also tried to enter the promising field of university texts. In 2007, the Moscow-based publisher Knizhnyi mir agreed to release a collection of ethnopolitical course books, as well as two other books – *Race and Ethnos* (*Rasa i etnos*), co-authored by Sevast'ianov and Avdeev, and *Ethnos and Nation* (*Etnos i natsiia*), written by Sevast'ianov alone. In the introduction to *Race and Ethnos*, the authors define "ethnopolitics" (*etnopolitika*) as a new science that would enable Russian political leaders to defend their country. After a presentation of the different somatic sciences developed in the nineteenth

century and the contributions of modern genetics, the authors analyze the specificities of what they label the three major races: Europoid, Mongoloid, and Negroid. They then focus on the purported "Northern race," which includes all the ethnies (*etnos* in Russian) derived from the Europoid race, noting in passing that because the Russians are less mixed than other European peoples, they have maintained the purest traits.[56] In *Ethnos and Nation*, Sevast'ianov, aware that the Russian public is typically less accepting of racial themes than ethnic ones, seeks to equate the two discourses. He explains that ethnies are derived from large founding races and, as such, must be studied according to racial criteria, particularly brain shape. He reiterates that "all spiritual specificities that differentiate ethnies are anchored in their biological nature."[57]

Rodnoverie: worldview and faith

While Aryan theories are exclusively rooted in far-right ideological reservoirs, neo-paganism is a more multifaceted phenomenon that also includes groups that are less politicized. They define themselves by the term *Rodnoverie*, ethnic faith or "Mother Faith," and reject the external designation of neo-paganism (*neo-iazychevstvo*): they do not consider themselves "new," and "paganism" is sometimes considered to have negative connotations vis-à-vis Christianity. *Rodnoverie* seeks to be broader than a neo-pagan religious practice and more inclusive than simple adherence to a pantheon of pre-Christian gods. Another commonly used emic term is "Vedic faith" (*vedizm*, *vedicheskaia vera*), which refers to ancient Indo-Iranian Vedism texts (Avesta and the Rig-Veda), ancestrism (*rodianstvo*), or natural faith (*prirodnaia vera*). Some of its followers speak of spirituality (*dukhovnost'*), wisdom (*mudrost'*), or a form of philosophy or worldview (*mirovozrenie*), more than of a religion.[58] The societal and political views espoused by *Rodnoverie* adherents are extremely broad, ranging from extreme pacifism to militarism, from complete de-politicization, semi-anarchism and ecologism to far-right groups that describe themselves as national socialists.

Rodnoverie ideology is strongly influenced by the ideas of European Romanticism, specifically by Herderian perceptions that it is God's will that the diversity of the world should be cultivated. Ethnicity must therefore be understood as territorialized – hence the importance accorded to the reconstruction of an Aryan/Slavic/Russian identity.[59] *Rodnoverie* reclaims the ancient rituals described in historical and ethnological sources on the Russian countryside. A broad public interest in the history of Slavic antiquity, folk traditions, regional cultural specificities, and the rediscovery of ancient peasant rites and superstitions related to the worship of Mother Earth (witchcraft, folk beliefs, and the practices of Old Believers), including "double faith" (*dvoeverie*, a mixture of Christian and pagan practices documented in ethnological sources), form the foundation on which *Rodnoverie* blends folk spirituality and nationalist theories.

Solstice rituals, in particular, attract thousands of people for whom the reference to an ancient and natural religion is devoid of political subtext.[60] Popular ancient Russian peasant festivals such as Ivan Kupala (summer solstice), Koliada

(winter solstice), and Maslenitsa (a carnival day eight weeks before Easter) can bring together wide audiences more interested in the festive and folkloric, rather than religious, aspects of the event.[61] Some small *Rodnoverie* groups seek to achieve financial independence by producing traditional handicrafts or rehabilitating ancient pharmacopeia, which they sell at markets or folk fairs. In this way, *Rodnoverie* style is becoming a commercial product: all major groups have a shop or a website where they sell "typically Slavic" jewelry and ornaments, musical instruments, posters and calendars illustrated with reproductions of pagan imagery, and designs inspired by Tolkien.[62]

Rodnoverie's conception of faith contains several contradictions. It is an "open source religion"[63] and thus follows New Age movements according to which the world experiences different levels of reality. But it also calls for adherence to tradition, composed of the legacy of Slavic ancestors to whom the highest possible respect is owed. However, some groups admit that what they know about authentic Slavic religion is very fragmented, and therefore its reconstruction should be personal. According to the majority of *Rodnoverie* followers, neither a unique dogma nor a supreme authority exists. They insist on the direct link between man and the divine. *Rodnoverie* is thus a faith without a prophet, a sacred text (even if some treat the *Book of Veles* as a collection of prayers), an institutionalized place of worship (with the exception of some minority groups that support the construction of temples, worship is performed in nature), clergy (priests exist, but they do not have the authority to intervene with God, as in Orthodoxy or Catholicism), dogma and interdicts, or mandatory rites and prayers.[64]

The search for meaning can only be an individual one, and each human is entitled to establish his or her own pantheon of beliefs in diverse combinations. Individual interpretations and sensations dominate over any institutionalized ideas. This assertion often comes with a discourse on the democratic nature of the faith. *Rodnoverie* is presented as a religion devoid of any social exploitation, power relations, or financial and institutional reality.[65] Human freedom is thus expressed through the equality of men in their access to the divine. Social justice is an important element of reference. Christianity is denounced as a hierarchical, centralized power that has defended the rich throughout its history, accepted the enslavement of man by man, and legitimized a slave mentality. Although certain *Rodnoverie* groups founded by charismatic leaders are prone to relatively authoritarian visions of power led by a head guru, the majority call for the rejection of power relations and the autonomy and responsibility of the individual, actively campaigning against drinking, smoking, and drugs.[66]

Followers do not perceive the eclecticism and syncretism of religious inspiration as contradictory. It is therefore difficult to determine whether Rodnovers think of their faith in monotheist, polytheist, or pantheist terms. Some of them assert the existence of a unique superior principle (Rod or Svarog), while others advocate the existence of multiple gods with dissociated functions. Some insist on a dual conception, with Belbog representing the good principle and Chernobog embodying the evil; others prefer to believe in a trinity consisting of the

Creator, the Destroyer, and the Harmonizer. The general precepts are based on the idea of a trinity with Iav (the visible world), Nav (the world of beyond), and Prav (the world of laws), which represent different levels of reality. Even the Russian pantheon mentioned by all *Rodnoverie* movements is not unified. Several gods from ancient Slavic mythology – like Svarog (god of the sun), Veles (god of the Earth), Perun (god of thunder), Dazhbog, and Khors – are in mutual competition, with each movement favoring one or another. Others, inspired by Western traditions, refer to ancient Germanic and Scandinavian gods such as Thor and Odin. The majority claim to have several dozen gods: gods of water, fire, fertility, fisheries, the Earth, the moon, animals, and the dead complement the "historic" gods.

In addition, all movements invite their members to add their own ancestors to the pantheon, since the worship of one's lineage (*rod*) is considered a basic principle.[67] Everyone can create his own religious combinations – "Each of us can choose objects to worship,"[68] announced the group Slavia – but adherents must respect a minimal framework in which the idea of national tradition dominates. Each movement, for example, produces its own calendar and organizes festivities around the passage of seasons, the memory of the dead, and the natural elements.[69] Some *Rodnoverie* groups draw their inspiration in part from Oriental religions, following the popular propensity toward Eastern spirituality within the Russian intelligentsia during the last decades of the Soviet Union. They mention Buddha, Zarathustra, and Manu, as well as many Hindu divinities and the holy text of the Krishnas, the *Bhagavad Gita*. Within these trends, there has been widespread reading of Elena Blavatsky, Sri Aurobindo (1872–1950), and Carlos Castaneda (1931–1998), the last two of which were translated into Russian early in the 1990s. The same applies to the work of George Gurdjieff (1873–1949), Petr Uspenskii (1878–1947), and Nikolai Rerikh, as well as theoreticians of Cosmism. The practice of energetic healing, Asian medicine, martial arts, and diverse versions of yoga are integral parts of this Oriental-inspired *Rodnoverie*. Some groups are focused on the ideas of bio-energy, karma, reincarnation, telepathy, and stories about UFOs and the mysteries of the cosmos.

Rodnoverie presents itself as a postmodern attempt to rehabilitate the spiritual to the detriment of the material. Institutionalized religions are accused of granting too much importance to their ritual and theological aspects, while *Rodnoverie* claims to put morality, ethics, and spirituality at the center of its message. Eschatological patterns and problematic relations with modernity are recurring themes in the movement.[70] Its followers often think that mankind is on the road to ruin because it denies religious values in favor of material well-being. The development of technology and knowledge of natural science has given men the illusory idea that they control nature. The modern world has thus embarked on a dead-end path that will lead the whole of mankind to its downfall; the Soviet experience confirmed the impossibility of man dominating nature. This denunciation of industrial modernity represents a recurring element of *Rodnoverie* discourse, in which what is at stake is not material comfort but the meaning given to life. According to them, the origin of the current technological madness can

be found in the great historical religions. As a result, they condemn Christianity and other Abrahamic religions as anthropocentric. By asserting that man was created in the likeness of God, and by suggesting that the latter could have been incarnated as a man (Christianity) or could have transmitted his message through a man (Islam), monotheist religions distort the place of mankind within nature. Only nature can be considered representative of the divine on Earth, as man occupies a more modest position in this hierarchy.

Rodnoverie, which presents itself as a natural religion, insists on the need to "return" to nature and defend ecological claims. The group Slavia, for instance, posted virulent critiques of the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi on its website, denouncing the Olympics' role in deforestation.[71] *Rodnoverie* imagery often evokes "typically Russian" countryside – birch and fir forests, lakes, and wooden villages in the snow, relying on the old imagery of nineteenth-century Romantic painting and national folklore artists like Ivan Bilibin (1876–1942). Since the nineteenth century, the idea that the "Russian soul" is fundamentally marked by the landscape of the country has constituted a classic element of discourse on the "Russian idea." This discourse belongs to the most persistent clichés in Russian history, which would not fit Western schemas: the vastness of the territory and the flat, dull, and dreary nature of the great Russian plain invite one to withdraw into family life, religious meditation, and contemplation, but not to make a political or social commitment. Moreover, since as early as the 1960s, environmentalist sensibilities have constituted one of the main inspirations for Russian nationalist circles, which opposed the Soviet willingness to subjugate nature to the industrial needs of the regime. Some *Rodnoverie* groups take up the ancient Russian traditions of the cult of Mother Earth, claiming that the Slavs, as children of the forest, will be the first to rediscover harmony with nature.[72]

Esoteric concepts and practices

Occult theories and practices constitute an important part of *Rodnoverie*, but it cannot be considered an entirely occult movement. Some of its practices, like readings and prayers, are rather exoteric and public, fully visible to everyone. The initiatory character may be significant, but it differs between groups and the leadership's viewpoint on this exoteric versus esoteric question. Some seek to combine the Slavic faith with a belief in alchemy, arcane science, and forms of white or black magic, while others insist on the exoteric, popular, and folk character of their faith. Furthermore, as *Rodnoverie* conceptions vary from one individual to another, a member's level of commitment plays a central role. The least invested members and the most open communities tend to spread exoteric knowledge, which is accessible to many people, and insist on folklore, for example, large celebrations for the solstice. More closed groups, which make more stringent demands on the individual, advocate for esoteric practices such as complex initiation rituals, prayers, and belief in magic. *Rodnoverie* being more a worldview than a practice, the occult appears primarily at the level of discourse in three main areas: the feeling of having hidden or secret knowledge, accessible

only to a limited group of insiders, the belief in superior knowledge that gives access to the supernatural world, and the idea of having, through this connection with a higher world, a power over human beings and world events, or even mind control.

All *Rodnoverie* groups are based on the idea that religion is a hidden knowledge that only those who are "awake" to the true faith can understand. This vision of self is common to all new religious movements, which paint in heroic terms their small size compared to major institutionalized churches. This is reinforced by the idea that for two millennia, Christianity has deliberately destroyed the pagan memory, denied its presence in the popular consciousness, and done everything possible to prevent new awareness of the original faith of the Slavs.[73] This secret understanding is accessible through myths, tales, and legends, which are thought of as relics transformed over centuries into ancient knowledge that one must now decipher and reinterpret, since the original meaning is no longer apparent.[74] As Aleksandr Belov, one of the main authors of neo-pagan bestsellers, put it, "Myths are the subconscious of humanity. There was a time when they were reality. Time has transformed them into tales, the original links to the heroes having been lost."[75]

Through its militant atheism, as well as the conspiracy theories that it spawned, the Soviet period accentuated this sense of secret knowledge waiting to be discovered. Although some *Rodnoverie* groups insist on their tolerance of all beliefs as a basic principle of the Native faith, most publications have a tendency to explain the world in very Manichean terms, with the minority forces of good struggling against the majority forces of evil. Allusions to mysterious or parallel worlds that could have existed on Russian territory are often influenced by Aryan assumptions or claims of the superiority of Russian civilization, which supposedly inspired all great ancient cultures. Theories of an alleged Jewish and Christian conspiracy against the original faith are particularly numerous and widespread, including in *Rodnoverie*, the journal published by the Union of Slavic Communities.[76] Some minority movements inspired by apocalyptic expectations tend to promise their members survival after events that threaten the future of the Earth.[77]

The precepts of *Rodnoverie* are secrets not only because they are held by a chosen few, but also because they provide access to higher knowledge. Sometimes heavily influenced by Eastern religions, Buddhism, Shintoism, and Hinduism, *Rodnoverie* revalues esotericism as a higher knowledge, generally accessible in two non-contradictory ways. One stresses the need for a holistic worldview that connects body, mind, and soul through physical practices inspired by yoga or the martial arts. The Association of Slavonic-Goritsa Wrestling was, in the 1990s, the best-known of these groups, and to this day many military-patriotic clubs for children and adolescents offer a Russian version of martial arts, *rukopashnyi boi*, and updated versions of so-called Slavic sports.[78] For the majority of *Rodnoverie*, demonstrations of men's physical strength in tournaments where teams symbolically compete are a sign of courage and superiority.[79] These are also a metaphor for nature, to wit the victory of spring over winter.

Other groups give preference to symbolism. Traditional animals such as wolves, ravens, and the phoenix are associated with specific gods, and prayers to their images allow one to intercede with the deity in question.[80] Some ancient symbols, like geometric shapes or runic writings found during archaeological excavations, have been reclaimed and endowed with new meanings. The six- or eight-branch swastika remains a key component of the accession to the upper world. For many *Rodnoverie* groups, the Orthodox cross is the Slavic version of the swastika (also called *kolovrat* in Russian), which can be found in Hinduism and Buddhism. Some Russian nationalists have been pushing this claim since the 1970s. Archaeological excavations suggest an association between the swastika and Svarog, the ancient Slavic god of the sun, which can justify this overlap, common in every Indo-European society. This interpretation is especially popular in groups for which Orthodoxy is not considered a single branch of a universal Christian religion, but the national religion of the Russian people, close to the native faith.[81]

Certain groups engage in magical thinking, in particular the assumption of a link between language and cosmos, in an unacknowledged similarity to Kabbalah. This idea partly inspired the revival of the cult of names (*imiaslavie*), an old Orthodox tradition present until the beginning of the twentieth century in Mount Athos monasteries; it claims that the repetition of the name of God allows one to come closer to him. In Russian, the terms for pagan (*iazychnik*) and language (*iazyk*) have the same root.[82] This observation reinforces the convictions of some groups that the Cyrillic alphabet and its predecessor, the Glagolitic alphabet, have a magical character.[83] The group *Vseiasvetnaia gramota* (Pan-Universal Charter), for instance, thought that liturgical Old Slavonic was endowed with a transcendent reality: certain Slavic letters are considered keys to the cosmos or to extraterrestrial civilization, or endowed with supernatural powers that could be used by initiates.[84] For one of the proponents of this theory, Aleksandr Pleshanov, the Cyrillic alphabet is a way to communicate with heaven, as the letters have a hidden meaning with the potential to predict major global disasters.[85]

Occult principles also mark ritual practices. The main rites of *Rodnoverie* feature gestures and encoded chants that allow participants to enter into communion with the divine world, especially in rites of passage such as baptism with a pre-Christian name (*imianarechenie*), entry into the brotherhood (*bratanie*), marriage, and death. These rituals all take place in forests at specific sites that the group has previously sanctified. On the occasion of rituals dedicated to the gods (the days of Vles, Perun, and Svarog), some groups carve wooden faces representing these gods and enter into communion with them, which is substantiated by the presence of an energy beam they claim to have photographed.[86] The rituals of sacrifice (*prinesenie treby*), mainly agricultural products and *kvas*, also have hidden meanings, as does the lighting of fire (*vozzhiganie ognia*). The search for the occult enables group members to create their own codes, preferences, and boundaries, thus strengthening the sense of community among insiders.

Some *Rodnoverie* movements have developed international networks. Their pan-Slavic sensibilities encourage them to collaborate mainly with their Ukrainian,

Belorussian, Bulgarian, and Serbian counterparts, often inspired by the same forged manuscripts, in particular the *Book of Veles*, and making similar references to Slavic identity.[87] For instance, the All-Slavic Council of Native Believers gathers *Rodnoverie* followers from the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Some others have developed relations with German and Scandinavian groups. The Baltic countries are also known for their neo-pagan movements, which played an important role in the struggle for independence in 1990–1991. In contemporary Latvia, the Dievturiba association draws its inspiration from the association of the same name, which was founded in the 1920s with the objective of bringing back the ancient Latvian religion but was repressed by the Soviet authorities when they took over the republic.[88] In Lithuania, the Romuva movement emerged as a cultural association as early as 1967 on the occasion of the summer solstice. The movement advocated the rediscovery of national faith by the rehabilitation of popular songs, practices, and rituals.[89] As in the case of Russian *Rodnoverie*, the Baltic movements are split between far-right activists and partisans of a national rebirth expressed in religious and cultural terms. Groups are also divided "geopolitically," with some pro-Russian and others anti-Russian.

Some other *Rodnoverie* groups seem more inspired by native faiths from the Uralic and Siberian populations. Among these groups, Shamanism benefits from a privileged status: not only does it enjoy international prestige, but it is also considered both the best-preserved and the most demonstrative ritual practice. To wit, the occult movement Belovodie, based in Barnaul, explains that its traditions are partly based on "the mysterious studies of the people of Siberia, the Altai, and Central Asia, the hidden esoteric side of Russian pre-Christian beliefs, and Shamanism. It teaches ancient magic, the art of healing, and the understanding of trees, animals, and Shamanism."[90] The Circle of Veles, for its part, tried to develop a kind of cult around white stones found in nature, probably inspired by the cults of anthropomorphic stones of Turkic-Mongolian peoples.[91] This animism insists on the sanctity of Earth and nature – on the continuum between man and nature – but also bases itself on nativist theories. The re-sacralization of Earth enables indigenous movements to fight on their own ground, in Russia and elsewhere, asking for their rights as original inhabitants. Thus, the pioneer peoples who arrived late to already inhabited lands have an implicit duty to appropriate the cults of the Earth of the peoples they dominated – a trend visible, for instance, in the way some new American religious movements take their inspiration from American Indian Shamanism. Some Russian ethnic faith movements do the same, drawing on the religious arsenal of the rituals of Siberian native peoples and old cosmogonies linked to the cult of the Mother Earth.

Yet in contrast to Western New Age movements, which are dominated by female participation, *Rodnoverie* is not very marked by feminine symbols. Despite the cult of Mother Earth and some fertility rituals, the Russian movements mostly exhibit virility and masculine symbols. In addition, the narrative of *Rodnoverie* is very conservative in terms of mores: it calls for heterosexuality,

fidelity, and procreation. The sexual liberation dimension of the Western New Age is totally absent – and even disparaged.

* * *

Neo-paganism is not destined to woo a large number of converts in Russia. As in other European countries, it will remain a marginal religious strand in comparison to institutionalized churches, even more with the rise in power of the Russian Orthodox Church and its resonant voice on many societal, political, and cultural issues. But the strength of *Rodnoverie* lies elsewhere. First, it testifies to the vibrancy of esoteric quests in today's societies and undermines the idea that modernity signals the end of faith; the questioning by individuals of the hidden interactions between man, the cosmos, and a higher power via all kinds of initiatory practices is not about to disappear. Second, it has managed to diffuse historical themes about Ancient Rus' that are fully compatible with the Orthodox or agnostic sentiments of most Russian citizens.

An eminently postmodern spiritual quest at the forefront of individualism and environmentalism, *Rodnoverie* also demands a supposed return to traditions, and display a quest for cultural and religious "authenticity," which could be rediscovered simply by erasing two millennia of Christianity. *Rodnoverie* thus simultaneously celebrates the nature's multiplicity, because each nation is invited to cultivate its natural faith or ancestry, and holds Slavic/Aryan characteristics in the highest regard. Some of its arguments against historical religions are borrowed from Soviet atheist propaganda, for example that Christianity and Islam justified the exploitation of the lower classes and wars between nations. Its implicit or explicit anti-Semitic positioning (refusing Christianism's universality as a sign of its Jewish origin) is also largely a product of Soviet "Zionology." It therefore shares, consciously or not, many themes that are instrumental to the far-right repertoire.

The doctrine of Russia's Aryanness has been gaining supporters, both in its core version of racialism and its milder interpretation of Russians being part of a white Europe which has to protect itself against migrants. Yet it remains difficult to capture the segment of the population that supports, in one way or another, a narrative of Russia's "white-ness." Vladimir Shcherbakov's *All about Atlantida* (*Vse ob Atlantide*, published in several editions in the 1990s) has sold about 200,000 copies; his other books, as well as those of Aleksandr Asov and Valerii Diomin, have had smaller print runs of between 5,000 and 20,000 copies. Yet these numbers do not tell us whether readers consider them as works of fiction or as "documenting" Russia's Aryanness. In a 2014 online survey via the social network VKontakte, 43 percent of the 360,000 participants agreed with the sentence "Our race displays many qualities superior to other races," while more than 50 percent supported the idea that migrants degrade the gene pool (*migratsiia portit genofond*).[92] Yet this says nothing of a broader support. The impact of implied Aryan historical references and aesthetics, visible in the cultural realm – one of the latest examples being Ivan Shurkhovetskii's film *The Legend of the*

Swastika (*Legenda o Kolovrate*, 2017), which depicts Russians as Aryans and references Celtic and Nordic mythology – remains to be studied. Yet several other attempts at promoting far-right doctrines have taken shape through other groups and figures. Of these, Aleksandr Dugin is undoubtedly the most famous.

Notes

1 This chapter combines two previous articles: "Alternative Identity, Alternative Religion? Neo-Paganism and the Aryan Myth in Contemporary Russia," *Nations and Nationalism* 14, no. 2 (2008): 283–301, and "The *Rodnoverie* Movement: The Search for Pre-Christian Ancestry and The Occult," in Menzel, Hagemeister, and Rosenthal, eds. *The New Age of Russia* (2012), 293–310.
2 The most complete and contextualized overview of the phenomenon can be found in Viktor Shnirel'man, *Ariiskii mif v sovremennom mire* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2015).
3 Massimo Introvigne, *Le New Age des origines à nos jours. Courants, mouvements, personnalités* (Paris: Dervy, 2005). For Russia, see Holly DeNio Stephens, "The Occult in Russia Today," in *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture*, ed. Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 357–376.
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7 Evgenii Moroz, "Le védisme, version païenne de l'idée russe," *Revue d' études comparatives Est-Ouest* 24, no. 3–4 (1993): 183–197.
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9 Viktor Shnirel'man, *Intellektual'nye labirinty*, 229.
10 Mitrokhin, *'Russkaia partiia'*.
11 Korey, *Russian Antisemitism*.
12 Shnirel'man, *Intellektual'nye labirinty*, 231.
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14 Vladimir Pribylovskii, "Pamiat," in *Natsional'naia pravaia prezhde i teper'*. ed. Rafael Ganelin (St. Petersburg: Institut sotsiologii RAN, 1992).
15 Brudny, *Reinventing Russi*.
16 Shnirel'man, *Intellektual'nye labirinty*.
17 Kaganskaya, "The Book of Vlas."
18 Evgenii Moroz, *Istoriia "Mertvoi vody" – ot strashnoi skazki k bol'shoi politike. Politicheskoe neoiazychestvo v postsovetskoi Rossii* (Stuttgart: Ibidem- Verlag, 2005), 27–28.
19 Asov and Konovalov, *Ot X tysiacheletii do nashei ery do X veka nashei ery. Drevnie ariisty. Slaviane. Rus'* (Moscow: Veche, 2002).
20 Viktor Shnirel'man, "Passions about Arkaim: Russian Nationalism, the Aryans, and the Politics of Archaeology," *Inner Asia* 1, no. 2 (1999): 267–282.
21 See, for instance, Iurii D. Petukhov, *Sverkhevoliutsiia i Vysshii razum mirozdaniia. Superetnos rusov: ot mutantov k bogochelovechestvu* (Moscow: Metagalaktika, 2005).

22 This idea has been developed by Anatolii Fomenko and his "New Chronology." See Laruelle, "Conspiracy and Alternate History." See also Sheiko, in collaboration with Brown, *Nationalist Imaginings on the Russian Past*, and Halperin, "False Identity."
23 E.S. Galkina, "Tainy Russkogo kaganata" (2002), http://slavyanskaya-kultura.ru/clubs/53_e-s-galkina-tainy-ruskogo-kaganata-2002-pdf.html.
24 Valerii Demin, *Rus' giperboreiskaia* (Moscow: Veche, 2002).
25 See for instance "Belovod'e," http://taynikrus.ru/zagadki-istorii/belovode-uteryannyj-mif-ili-realnost/.
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28 Evgenii Moroz, "Iazychniki v Sankt-Peterburge," in *Neoiazychestvo na prostorakh Evrazii*, ed. Viktor Shnirel'man (Moscow: Bibleisko-Bogoslovskii institut, 2001).
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31 Il'ia Lazarenko, "A eti ne liubiat vostok," *Kommersant Ogonek*, October 17, 1999, www.kommersant.ru/doc/2286849; "Glava 3. Pravye radikaly mezhdu Bogom i natsiei," Politicheskii antisemitizm v sovremennoi Rossii, SOVA Center for Information and Analysis, 2003, https://web.archive.org/web/20090311033947/http://xeno.sova-center.ru:80/1ED6E3B/216049A/2160519.
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33 More details in Evgenii Moroz, *Istoriia "Mertvoi vody" – ot strashnoi skazki k bol'shoi politike. Politicheskoe neoiazychestvo v postsovetskoi Rossii* (Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag, 2005).
34 On that school, read the two main works: Viktor Shnirel'man, '*Tsepnoi pes rasy': divannaia rasologiia kak zashchitnitsa 'belogo cheloveka'* (Moscow: SOVA, 2007), and Mark Bassin, "'What Is More Important? Blood or Soil?' Rasologiia Contra Eurasianism," in *The Politics of Eurasianism. Identity, Popular Culture and Russia's Foreign Policy*, eds. Mark Bassin and Gonzalo Pozo (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017), 39–58.
35 *"Krov' i pochva Vladimira Avdeeva,"* Spetsnaz *3, no. 14 (2006), www.specnaz.ru/article/?877.*
36 See the website "Obshchestvennyi Mezhdunarodnyi Fond Slavianskoi Pis'mennosti i Kultury," www.slavfond.ru/about.htm.
37 See the website "Soiuz Pisatelei," http://soyuzpisateley.ru/.
38 "Istorik, uchreditel' i izdatel' zhurnala *Atenei* Pavel Tulaev," *Portal Credo*, January 20, 2005, www.portal-credo.ru/site/print.php?act=authority&id=278.
39 See Vladimir Avdeev, ed., *Russkaia rasovaia teoriia do 1917* (Moscow: Feri-V, 2002).
40 See the official transcript of the Procurature, January 20, 2007, www.savelev.ru/article/show/?id=399&t=1.
41 See the website "Atenei: Tsentr Znanii I Iskusstv," www.ateney.ru.
42 See, for instance, the three volumes by Valerii Bogdanov, *Etnicheskaia i evoliutsionnaia istoriia Rusi*.
43 Stéphane François, "Les paganismes de la Nouvelle Droite (1980–2004)" (PhD diss., University of Lille, 2005), https://tel.archives-ouvertes.fr/tel-00442649/document; Nicolas Lebourg, *Le Monde vu de la plus extrême droite: Du fascisme au nationalisme-révolutionnaire* (Perpignan, 2010).
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48 See Valerii Tishkov, *Rekviem po etnosu. Issledovaniia po sotsial'no-kul'turnoi antropologii* (Moscow: Nauka, 2003) and Valerii Tishkov, *Etnologiia i politika* (Moscow: Nauka, 2001).
49 Stepanishchev and Charnyi, "Natsionalizm, ksenofobiia."
50 A.N. Savel'ev, *Vremia russkoi natsii* (Moscow: Knizhnyi mir, 2007), 56.
51 Shnirel'man, "Rasologiia v deistvii."
52 Personal observations, Moscow Duma, October 2007.
53 A.N. Savel'ev, *Rasovyi smysl russkoi idei* (Moscow: Belye al'vy, 2000); A.N. Savel'ev, *Obraz vraga. Rasologiia i politicheskaia antropologiia* (Moscow: Belye al'vy, 2007).
54 Savel'ev, *Vremia russkoi natsii*, 378.
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59 Ivakhiv, "Nature and Ethnicity in East European Paganism," 202–203.
60 Viktor Shnirel'man, "Nazad k iazychestvu? Triumfal'noe shestvie neoiazychestva po prostoram Evrazii," in Shnirel'man, *Neoiazychestvo*, 28–30.
61 "Nasha vera. Osnovanie," Sodruzhestva Slaviia, www.slavya.ru/vera.htm.
62 "Runnyi posokh," http://runposoh.clan.su.
63 An "open source religion" emphasizes individual participation and doctrinal evolution, and calls for the personal creation of religious belief systems.
64 Kaarina Aitamurto, "Russian Paganism and the Issue of Nationalism: A Case Study of the Circle of Pagan Tradition," *Pomegranate: The International Journal of Pagan Studies* 8, no. 2 (2006): 184–210.
65 Mariya Lesiv, "Glory to Dazhboh (Sun-god) or to All Native Gods? Monotheism and Polytheism in Contemporary Ukrainian Paganism," *Pomegranate* 11, no. 2 (2009): 147–164.
66 See, for example, the strict rules Krivichi put forward on the use of alcohol and cigarettes, and respect for nature (available on the organization's website, www.krivichi.3dn.ru/index/0–2).
67 See, for example, the importance the group *Rodstvo* accords to genealogy (available on the organization's website, http://rodstvo.ru/).
68 Sodruzhestva Slaviia, "Nasha vera. Osnovanie."
69 "Prazdniki," Rodnovery, www.rodnovery.ru/prazdniki.html.
70 Anastasia Koskello, "Sovremennye iazycheskie religii Evrazii: Krainosti globalizma i antiglobalizma," in *Religiia i globalizatsiia na prostorakh Evrazii*, eds. Aleksei Malashenko and Sergei Filatov (Moscow: Carnegie Tsentr, 2009), www.portal-credo.ru/site/?act=lib&id=2448.
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73 See Aleksandr Asov, *Slavianskie vedy* (Moscow: Fair-Press, 2003) and Aleksandr Asov, *Sviato-russkie vedy. Kniga Veleseva* (Moscow: Fair-Press, 2007), in which he presents himself purely as a translator of and commentator on ancient texts, and his personal website, http://acov.m6.net/, where he renders several texts and explains his methods for reconstructing ancient knowledge.

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76 "Teoriia zagovora," *Rodnoverie* 1–2 (2010), http://rodnoverie.org/002/index.html.
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84 "Obschestvennaia organizatsiia Vseiasvetnaia gramota," www.vgramota.ru/vctuplenie.php.
85 See, for instance, Aleksandr Pleshanov, *Russkii alfavit. Kod obshcheniia cheloveka s kosmosom* (Moscow: Novyi tsentr, 2004) and Aleksandr Pleshanov, "Russkii alfafit kak instrument nauchnogo poznaniia" (n.d.), www.soznanie.info/ezo_pleshan.html.
86 "Lik Svaroga," www.svet.sva.name/lik.html.
87 A.V. Gurko, "Neoiazychestvo v Belarusi: predposylki i usloviia vozniknoveniia, organizatsionnye formy, perspektivy," in Shnirel'man, *Neoiazychestvo*, 68–79.
88 S.I. Ryzhakova, "Dievturiba. Religiozno-natsional'naia ideia i ee realizatsiia v Latvii," in Shnirel'man, *Neoiazychestvo*, 80–113.
89 Donatas Glodenis, "La situation religieuse en Lituanie – Entretien avec Donatas Glodenis," *Religioscope*, January 29, 2003, http://religioscope.info/article_65.shtml.
90 See the Belovod'e website, www.vav.ru/belovod/.
91 "Belyi kamen," http://bely-kamen.ru.mastertest.ru/.
92 Ivan A. Grin'ko, "Sotsial'nyi portret setevogo rasizma v Runete (po dannym sotsial'nyh setei)," in *Rossiia – Ne Ukraina: sovremennye aktsenty natsionalizma*, ed. Aleksandr Verkhovskii (Moscow: SOVA Center, 2014), 62–73.

5 A textbook case of doctrinal entrepreneurship

Aleksandr Dugin

Western scholars have already analyzed Aleksandr Dugin's work and biography *ad nauseam*.[1] Since the mid-1990s, Dugin has been the best marketed of all Russian ideologists, both in Russia and in the West. His prolific character and his ability to publish in very diverse media outlets and to speak to different audiences, combined with the Western fascination with him, have kept him in the media spotlight both in Russia and abroad. At the risk of courting controversy, it is worth asking whether he is not more famous abroad than in Russia, and if Western experts – myself included – are not partly responsible for his excessive visibility.

That being said, scholars often confine their investigations to discourse analysis. Some elements of his biography remain understudied, especially his youth and his time in Pamiat. More generally, we know very little about his personal networks of patrons and can only speculate about who supports and funds him. We have no in-depth study of his enterprises, from the Arctogaia "think tank" in the early 1990s to the Eurasia Party project and the International Eurasianist Movement (IEM) in the 2000s. We also lack information on his revenue stream, how his books are marketed, and which state institutions and private structures have commissioned his work.[2]

The goal of this chapter is not to discuss Dugin's personality and trajectory for the umpteenth time, but instead to situate him as the main manufacturer of a neofacism *à la russe* that is both *within* and *outside* the circles of power. Here, I advance three hypotheses. First, far-right ideologies constitute Dugin's key doctrinal foundation, above anything more genuinely Russian (including Eurasianism) – he was exposed to it very early, during his years at the Moscow bohemian underground Iuzhinskii Circle in the 1980s.[3] Second, Dugin has never wavered in his loyalty to this doctrinal corpus. If he refuses to be designated a "fascist" and even states that he is fighting against fascism in Ukraine, he nevertheless continues to rehabilitate fascist philosophies, albeit under other names, and remains faithful to his first – and formative – ideology. Third, contrary to the claims of the majority of Western pundits, Dugin is not a member of the Kremlin's ideological circles; he is an outsider who can be used or rejected as needed, but remains more *out* than *in*.

Dugin is a complex doctrinaire. He is a *chameleon* thinker: he can adapt his discourse to different publics, speaking as a convinced proponent of Russian

statehood and great power before an audience of civil servants or senior military, while calling for revolutionary violence against the current political order when he communicates with countercultural groups. He is very much a *bricoleur*, creatively using what is currently fashionable to elaborate a philosophical metanarrative on Russia. He is obviously a prolific author, with about 30 monographs and textbooks to his name, and he has created several websites, including evrazia.org as a news portal on Eurasia, evrazia.info for the IEM, evrazia.tv for podcasts of events, arcto.ru for the philosophical and religious aspects of his doctrine, Rossia3.ru for the Eurasian Union of Youth, and eurasianaffairs.net for publications in English.

Well-read in mainstream philosophy and the humanities, Dugin is also an impressive *aggregator* of ideologies. He brings together doctrines from diverse origins and produces works on several levels of discourse: academically respectable texts with references to Max Weber and Michel Foucault, geopolitical expertise for broad news outlets, and hate pamphlets for radical websites and blogs. Influenced by Antonio Gramsci, he believes that the only way to influence politics is to first conquer the intellectual field and set its agenda. He does not conceal his ultimate goal: "a meta-ideology, common to all the enemies of the open society."[4] This meta-ideology may be unique in its syncretism, even eclecticism: Dugin compiles but does not fundamentally renew the doctrinal stock of "the enemies of the open society," yet he has given it unique visibility on the current ideological landscape of the Russian and Western far right.

Nativizing fascism for a Russian audience

Dugin's thinking can be visualized as concentric circles, with far-right ideologies as the backbone of his worldview, articulated around three traditions: esoteric Nazism (Aryanism, Hyperborea, Thule, conspiracy theories); Traditionalism or Perennialism inspired by René Guénon and Julius Evola;[5] the German Conservative Revolution of the 1920s and 1930s; and the European New Right, a reframing of far-right theories under the influence of some leftist doctrines, which incorporates anti-capitalist rhetoric as well as regionalist and ecological stances.[6]

In the second concentric circle of Dugin's *Weltanschauung*, one may find references to Russian elements: classical Eurasianism from the interwar period, National Bolshevism, Lev Gumilev's theories on Eurasia and ethnos, along with some nineteenth-century conservative Russian thinkers, such as Konstantin Leontiev (1831–1891), Nikolai Danilevskii (1822–1885), or Fiodor Dostoievskii, and even more marginal allusions to Soviet cultural figures or representatives of leftist doctrines. Russia-centric references are clearly peripheral for Dugin, with one exception, that of Orthodoxy – in particular the Old Believer Church, of which he is a member.[7]

A third concentric circle of works includes Dugin's more academic publications. In 2008, with the support of the then-dean of Moscow State University's (MSU) scandal-plagued Sociology Department,[8] Vladimir Dobrenkov (1939), a Soviet-style philosopher and proponent of a nationalist agenda, Dugin launched

the Center for Conservative Research within the Sociology Department. Its declared objective was to counter the growing success of liberal universities, primarily the Higher School of Economics and the European University at St. Petersburg, and to reinforce the reputation of MSU as a bastion of conservatism by "developing and establishing a conservative ideology in Russia" and educating the next generation of "scholarly cadres."[9] Between 2008 and 2014, Dugin focused on producing textbooks – a commercially profitable enterprise – and devoted much of his energy to structuring a "conservative curriculum" that could be integrated into university programs. His Center offered students traditional courses (geopolitics and social sciences, international relations, introduction to structuralism, sociology of Russian society, introduction to religious studies, and introduction to philosophy) as well as less conventional disciplines (sociology of the imagination, sociology of geopolitical processes, deep sociology, ethnosociology, post-philosophy, etc.).[10] The online course descriptions confirm that in most cases Dugin merely reorganized themes related to his favorite topics, and the reading assignments on his syllabi were eclectic, to say the least.[11]

One major book spans all three of these concentric circles: *The Foundations of Geopolitics: Russia's Geopolitical Future* (*Osnovy geopolitiki. Geopoliticheskoe budushchee Rossii*),[12] first published in 1997. Commissioned by General Igor Rodionov, then-minister of defense (1996–1997),[13] by 2000 the book had been re-issued four times and enjoyed a large readership in academic and political circles. *Foundations of Geopolitics* became Dugin's calling card when reaching out to military circles and the establishment more broadly. Thanks to its success, he was invited to teach at the Academy of the General Staff; in addition, several Duma committees and state institutions commissioned him to write reports. The book's popularity has begun to decline in the last decade, but it is still considered a major, if controversial, reference work for the contemporary Russian school of geopolitics.

What is central in analyzing the role of geopolitics in Dugin's strategy, as Anton Shekhovtsov judiciously pointed out in a landmark piece, is the relationship between geopolitics and fascism. On Roger Griffin's definition, fascism aims at a "palingenetic" regeneration of the nation through a totalitarian process of destroying what existed previously.[14] Dugin's personal contribution to the philosophy of fascism is to position this palingenetic approach to the nation within the geopolitics of a state: the regeneration of the Russian nation will be realized by the total – and totalitarian – transformation of the Russian state on the international scene. The birth of a new mankind is therefore intimately linked not to a biological and cultural entity (the nation) but to a state, Russia, and a civilization, Eurasia. This explains why radically revisionist transformational geopolitics remains at the core of Dugin's worldview, an integral part of its philosophical arsenal: Eurasian geopolitics is seen as the concrete implementation of a fascist solution for post-Soviet Russia.

Rediscovering Russophile fascism

One of Dugin's first attempts to anchor fascism in the Russian context was to confront the widespread interpretation of fascism as the historical enemy of Russia and the associated memory of a fight to the death between Nazism and the Soviet Union. To do this, Dugin needed to rehabilitate the Russophile tradition of fascism and national socialism. He was not the only thinker trying to develop this narrative: in 1991, the conservative-leaning newspaper *Istoki* published excerpts of Alfred Rosenberg's *Myth of the Twentieth Century* (1930), explaining how Joseph Goebbels was a good friend of Russia.[15]

As early as 1992, thanks to his networks in Western Europe and especially his links with the French New Right doctrinaire Alain de Benoist, Dugin invited Jean Thiriart (1922–1992) to visit Moscow. A Belgian Nazi collaborator, Thiriart's inspiration was rooted in the attempt by the Waffen-SS to create a pan-European collaborationist movement that would defend the unity of the European continent and its Aryan identity. By the beginning of the 1980s, Thiriart had embraced the idea of a Euro-Soviet Alliance ("With Moscow, against Washington"), stating, "If Moscow wants to make Europe European, I preach total collaboration with the Soviet enterprise. I will then be the first to put a red star on my cap. Soviet Europe, yes, without reservations."[16] In August 1992, Thiriart made a trip to Moscow – his last journey before his death. There, he met with Dugin and the whole team around Prokhanov's newspaper *Den'*, as well as with Gennadii Ziuganov and several representatives of the so-called red–brown (nationalists and communists) opposition to Yeltsin. Brandishing Thiriart as the embodiment of a Russophile fascist tradition, Dugin's close acolyte Geidar Dzhemal (1947–2016) called on Russian public opinion to rethink its relationship to the European radical right and understand that a large segment favored an alliance with Russia. Dzhemal vehemently criticized "the official Soviet anti-fascism [that] largely helped to mythologize the Western right-wing in the eyes of Russians,"[17] and expressed the hope that this mythology would disappear with the collapse of Soviet ideology. Upon Thiriart's death in November 1992, Dugin wrote a long obituary praising him as the "Last Hero of Europe."[18]

Dugin promoted other Russophile figures from the European right. Among his main references is one of the founding fathers of German *Geopolitik* at the turn of the twentieth century, Karl Haushofer, who was convinced that Germany and Russia should cooperate as continental powers (tellurocracies) to defeat the maritime (thalassocratic) powers, chiefly the British Empire and its American colony.[19] Though not a member of the Nazi party, Haushofer was nevertheless close to Deputy Führer Rudolf Hess. In *Der Kontinentalblock Mitteleuropa-Eurasien-Japan* (1940), the German geopolitician, celebrating the continental axis, praised the 1939 Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact and what he saw as Hitler's wise "Eurasian policy."[20] For Dugin, Russia's centrality and continentalism are on a par with those of Germany in the 1920s–1930s.[21] He sees *Geopolitik* as simultaneously a holistic and totalitarian science and a *Weltanschauung*:

> Geopolitics is a vision of the world. It is therefore better to compare it not to sciences, but to systems of sciences. It is situated on the same level as Marxism, liberalism, etc., i.e., systems of interpretation of society and history.[22]

Alongside German *Geopolitik*, Dugin refers to another German Russophile intellectual tradition, that of the Conservative Revolution, and especially to National Bolshevik Ernst Niekisch (1889–1967), whom he has quoted on several occasions. Dugin also regularly mentions Niekisch's disciple Armin Mohler (1920–2003), a representative of the German New Right and author of *Die Konservative Revolution in Deutschland 1918–1932* (1st ed. 1949), which tried to rescue the Weimar Republic-era German far-right legacy from its association with national socialism. In keeping with this Russophile tendency, Mohler affirms that while the First Reich was Catholic and the Second Protestant, the Third would be Orthodox, a claim that could only gratify Dugin's religious feelings.

Dugin also directly rehabilitates national socialism, identifying three main pro-Russian forces in Nazi Germany, which he labels a "Eurasian order."[23] The first was the leftist Nazis, personified by the head of the Sturmabteilung (SA), Ernst Röhm (1887–1934), a trend that was annihilated in the 1934 Night of the Long Knives. Indeed, many SA officers had an anti-capitalist orientation that made them sensitive to the Soviet experience and discourse. In several of his early texts, as well as in 2006, Dugin publicly endorsed Otto Strasser (1897–1974) and his brother Gregor (1892–1934), who were both members of the Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (NSDAP) until they were expelled from the party in 1930. Gregor was killed during the Night of the Long Knives, although he had started his political career as a secretary to Goebbels. According to Dugin, the Strasser brothers embodied "the anti-Hitler tendencies of [German] leftist nationalists who wanted an alliance with Russia."[24]

The second pro-Russian force was located within the SS, embodied by its scientific section, the Ahnenerbe (Heritage of the Ancestors), which was in charge of the Nazi regime's historical production. Its activity centered on the quest for the original Aryan cradle, from Scandinavia to Tibet.[25] Dugin proclaims that the Waffen-SS, particularly the Ahnenerbe, was an "intellectual oasis in the national socialist regime."[26] He also celebrates Hermann Wirth (1885–1981), its main ideologue, and Heinrich Himmler (1900–1945), who led the political section of the SS. Dugin offered a detailed and apologetic analysis of Ahnenerbe in a five-part TV documentary, "Secrets of the Century" (*Tainy vekha*), hosted by the conservative journalist Yurii Vorobievskii on Channels One and Four in 1992. The early episodes were devoted to the mysticism of the Third Reich. Dugin, who claimed to have accessed some of the KGB's secret Ahnenerbe archives in Moscow, served as a key expert commentator throughout. This was both Dugin's first television appearance and the first presentation of Ahnenerbe to the Russian public. Although the program denounced Nazi mass violence and drew a parallel with the revival of Ustashi ideology in Croatia against the Serbs, it was deliberately ambiguous on the "Jewish question" and empathetic to the various secret

societies that existed within the Nazi movement.[27] Dugin's documentary films were indirectly inspired by the atmosphere of *Morning of the Magicians* by Louis Pauwels and Jacques Bergier, which was, in the 1960s, one of the first books to describe empathetically the close links between Nazism, occult practices, and conspiracy theories.[28]

Last but not least, Dugin introduced a "new" Russophile – Reinhard Heydrich (1904–1942), Himmler's deputy, SS Obergruppenführer, chief of the Reich main security services (including the Gestapo), and architect of the "final solution." He stated that "Heydrich was himself a convinced Eurasianist, and because of that he became the victim of the Atlanticists' intrigues."[29] As this statement suggests, for Dugin, the history of the European continent has long been that of a hidden war between two secret orders, the Eurasianist and the Atlanticist. This view came to him from Jean Parvulesco (1929–2010), a Romanian author in exile in France. Parvulesco, close to the New Right, was known for his conspiracy theories. In 1991, he gave Dugin an allegedly mysterious report entitled *The GRU Galaxy*: *The Confidential Mission of Mikhail Gorbachev, the USSR, and the Future of the Great Eurasian Continent*, which was partly based on Pierre de Villemarest's bestseller, *GRU: The Most Secret among the Soviet Special Services, 1918–1988*. In it, Parvulesco described the history of the Soviet Union as an invisible battle between a Eurasian order represented by the GRU (the military intelligence services), Lenin, and Stalin, on one side, and an Atlanticist order represented by the KGB, Khrushchev, Brezhnev, and Andropov, on the other.[30]

Dugin also applied Parvulesco's theories to the Nazi regime, which would allegedly have been one of the battlefields of the "final war" (*Endkampf)* between these two orders: a pro-Soviet Eurasianist faction led by Röhm, Himmler, Heydrich, and the Ahnenerbe, and a pro-Atlanticist Anglo-Saxon one, driven by "Hitler's Bavarian Catholic line"[31] and by Alfred Rosenberg and his "resentment of a German Baltic officer."[32] Dugin thus interpreted the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact as a critical historical moment that allowed the two continental powers, Germany and Russia, to unite against the Atlanticist countries. Hence his support for the agreement, which he defined as "the peak of the strategic success of Eurasianists" (*Pakt Ribbentrop-Molotov byl pikom stretegicheskogo uspekhov evraziitsev*)[33] and his regret that history had to "bifurcate" in 1941, resulting in a bloody confrontation between two natural allies, Russia and Germany.

Rescuing fascism as a political ideology

Shedding light on this Nazi Russophile tradition appears to be not only a lonely exercise – in the early 1990s, Dugin was often criticized by mainstream nationalists for his pro-fascist stance – but also a fruitless one, unable to shift Russian public opinion toward a rehabilitation of fascism. Dugin therefore reoriented his theoretical efforts toward reclassifying fascism not as a moment of history, but as an abstract political order that is as legitimate as any other. To that end, he articulated three lines of argument.

First, he separated fascism as a political theory from its historical realization and, in particular, from the main problematic aspect: Nazi genocide. Dugin exempted fascism in general from "German exceptionalism." Neither Franco nor Salazar, nor even Mussolini – at least before Hitler got the better of his Italian counterpart – promoted annihilating parts of the population on racial grounds. For Dugin:

> fascism has nothing in common with an extreme nationalism, a nationalist radicalism at the border of chauvinism and racial hate. Despite the existence of a racist and chauvinistic aspect in German National Socialism, this element did not define the core of the ideology.[34]

According to him, Ahnenerbe was a good example of non-racist Nazism, as it welcomed cooperation with non-European people from Asia and the Middle East who were considered part of the Aryan genealogy.[35] Only the Atlanticist line of Nazism promoted theories of racial destruction; the Russophile Eurasianist line was open to non-European peoples.[36] Even if one accepts Dugin's contention that the genocidal feature was indeed specific to Nazism, rather than an element of generic or classical fascism, his attempts to "excuse" this racist twist on fascism fail due to his belief in Aryan theories and the existence of races, as we will see below.

His second line of argument – advanced just after the collapse of the Soviet Union and very quickly abandoned – equated fascism with communism, thus implying that the former was no worse than the latter. In his early texts (in 1991–1992), Dugin denounced the Allies for discrediting the terms "fascism" and "national socialism" in the postwar period: supporters of liberalism and communism alike, he argued, "demonized alternative political-economic approaches" and associated the entirety of fascism with crime, violence, terror, and genocide.[37] In 1994, Dugin refined his reasoning to respond to national and international critics of the "red–brown threat" that allegedly endangered Russia's new liberal regime. He made the case that:

> Russian history cannot advance any serious argument to prove the "criminal" character of Russian fascism, as it never existed. Russian communism was marked by enormous repressions. Russian liberalism carries the blood of the assaulted Parliament. Russian fascism has nothing for which to be reproached.[38]

However, this equation of fascism and communism quickly disappeared from Dugin's work, as it was too confrontational toward Russia's popular memory of the Great Patriotic War and his own progressive rehabilitation of the Soviet regime.

The third line of argument anchored fascism in a discursive framework that had more positive connotations among certain segments of Russian public opinion, namely nationalism. To do so, Dugin played with words and blurred

terms to make them interchangeable. According to him, the concept of national socialism sounds negative even though the two words that compose it are themselves positive. Therefore, national socialism should be understood as no more than a "German socialism," because fascism is a proletarian regime "whose central figures are the peasant, worker, and soldier."[39] The Franco regime, for instance, would not qualify as fascist because it promoted "national capitalism," which is actually the enemy of authentic fascism. Similarly, "Russian fascism can be described as Russian socialism."[40] While Marxism-Leninism was lost amid sterile doctrinal rigidity, Russian national socialism, according to Dugin, would be "more peasant than proletarian, more communitarian and cooperative than statist, more regional than centralized."[41] From a political science perspective, fascism would therefore be no more than a "leftist nationalism," and should be considered as such. Consequently, Dugin deploys the words "nationalism" and "fascism" interchangeably. He opens his article "Leftist Nationalism" (1992) by stating, "The twentieth century knows only three forms of ideology: liberalism, communism, and nationalism."[42] In "Fascism without Border and Red" (1997), he replaces "nationalism" with "fascism," proclaiming, "Russia has passed two ideological moments, the communist and the liberal … fascism is the remaining one."[43]

Promoting the Conservative Revolution as a "clean hands" fascism

To develop a more solid narrative that would make fascism acceptable, Dugin had to go further than the lines of argument discussed above and revamp the tradition of the Conservative Revolution. Only that approach could facilitate fascism's reintegration into the realm of the "politically correct" by presenting it as a movement with no responsibility whatever for World War II violence. Dugin emphasizes the tensions between the Conservative Revolution theoreticians and Hitlerism, reminding his readers of their opposite worldviews: Hitlerism was further to the right, while the Conservative Revolution was distinctly more leftist; Hitler was a Russophobe whereas the Conservative Revolution representatives were Russophile; he was a racist while they were non-xenophobic nationalists.

Dugin also draws an intellectual lineage for the Conservative Revolution that nativizes it in the Russian context. He hopes to demonstrate that Conservative Revolution theories have always constituted the backbone of "Russian thought" (*russkaia mysl'*). The notion of a specific Russian Way, or *Sonderweg*, widely accepted in Russia,[44] is supposed to legitimate that of a Third Way, which Dugin equates historically with the Conservative Revolution principle. As he asserts, "The concept of the Third Way was almost always correlated to the concept of the Russian Way."[45] He starts by mentioning Slavophiles and Pan-Slavists, affirming that Iurii Samarin (1819–1876) was the first to use the term "revolutionary conservatism," in 1875.[46] He then appropriates the prestigious Russian tradition around the concept of the "Russian Idea,"[47] by invoking thinkers like Fiodor Dostoevskii, Konstantin Leontiev, and Nikolai Danilevskii, followed by the Eurasianists and the various National Bolshevik émigré movements.[48]

In his book *The Knights Templar of the Proletariat* (*Tampliery proletariata*, 1997), a compilation of his main articles from the early 1990s, Dugin synthetizes this strategy with a programmatic chapter unambiguously titled "Third Rome, Third Reich, Third International."[49] The parallel may appear audacious or out of place, but the references it evokes are not unfamiliar to the Russian public. By insisting on the "number" of the Reich, Dugin nurtures a significant theme in the Russian political tradition, that of a third, median world between two opposite principles. This median character is traditionally defined using a toolkit that comes from cultural geography: Russia is a third continent because it mediates between East and West, Europe and Asia, Slavs and Turks. Dugin's rediscovery of the founding fathers of Eurasianism therefore appears to be purely instrumental – not to mention late.[50] Eurasianist theories were, for him, the easiest and most convincing way to promote the Conservative Revolution theories and the Third Way narrative under a less controversial, non-German label.

Yet Dugin cannot refrain from integrating into the prestigious genealogy of the Conservative Revolution many more classical fascist regimes: the first years of Mussolini's regime, the Phalange movement in Spain led by José Antonio Primo de Rivera, the Iron Guard in Romania, and the Iranian Shia revolution.[51] He also includes Israel, "The only state that has partly managed to implement certain aspects of the Conservative Revolution."[52] To succeed in rehabilitating fascism, Dugin needs to dissociate the Nazi regime from the Conservative Revolution. And indeed, the latter cannot be considered responsible for the crimes of the former, even if it offered Nazism a fertile philosophical background. But Dugin, in any case, fails to convincingly articulate the dissociation that is crucial to the success of his endeavor. He affirms simultaneously that "fascism is the Third Way,"[53] that "the most complete and total (although also quite Orthodox) incarnation of the Third Way was German national socialism,"[54] and that "national socialism undoubtedly took and realized the impulsion coming from the conservative revolutionary ideology."[55] As such, the two terms largely overlap, and Dugin's demonstration of their differences and contradictions does not appear conclusive.

Fascism 2.0: the "fourth political theory"

In 2009, Dugin published a new book, *The Fourth Political Theory* (*Chetvertaia politicheskaia teoriia*), quickly translated into several languages (the book's website offered key excerpts in 34 languages) including English and French.[56] In it Dugin proclaims that he had definitively renounced what he calls the second and third political theories (communism and nationalism/fascism; the first theory being liberalism) and announced that the fourth theory requires a full break with the first three because it no longer seeks to accommodate modernity, but rather denies it entirely. Whereas in the early 1990s, he claimed that Russia had tested liberalism and communism and had to turn to a third choice, fascism/nationalism, 20 years later he proclaimed, "Liberalism, communism, and fascism – ideologies of the twentieth century – have finished. That is why it is necessary to create a new, fourth political theory."[57]

Despite such declarations of novelty, Dugin had, in fact, merely rearranged his long-held beliefs. Of all forms of conservatism, he states, the most interesting is that of the Conservative Revolution, which he defined by repeating the formula of Arthur Moeller van den Bruck: "Conservatives who have preceded us have sought to stop the revolution; we must take the lead."[58] The book also mentions National Bolshevism and Eurasianism – which he had promoted since the mid-1990s – as being the two ideologies closest to the fourth political theory. This new theory is therefore familiar territory. The slogan that accompanied the launch of *The Fourth Political Theory*, "Beyond left and right but against the center,"[59] is itself an archetype of fascist uprising against the status quo. Dugin himself offers the keys necessary to decipher his "novelty": he recognizes that the drama of the fourth political theory is:

> that it was hidden behind the third [Nazism and fascism]. Its tragedy is to have been overshadowed historically by the third, and being allied with it, given the impossibility to conduct an ideological war on three fronts [against liberalism, communism and fascism/ Nazism].[60]

Today, as in the early 1990s, Dugin thus continues to reclaim doctrines that can be broadly defined as fascist. He dusts off the Conservative Revolution, an intellectual fascism with "clean hands," as well as a classical fascism devoid of genocidal content – the Italian, Spanish, and Latin American fascisms, and the esoteric side of Nazi ideology. As such, he does not go as far as Armin Mohler, who admitted plainly that the Conservative Revolution was part of the national socialist doctrine, without trying to deny their intimate mutual resonances.[61] The Fourth Political Theory, far from being a doctrinal innovation, only reproduces Dugin's old arguments of the early 1990s about the validity of the Conservative Revolution, which he equates to Russia's own quest for a Third Way.

A large array of fascism-derived doctrinal elements

What accentuates Dugin's difficulties in elaborating a renewed fascist doctrine that would convincingly move away from the national socialist past is his constant reiteration of several ideological elements directly inspired by the Nazi tradition: his theory of races and Russia's Aryanness; his advocacy for iconic Nazi intellectuals and philosophers; his belief that totalitarian violence will give birth to a new mankind and his paramilitary training for youth; and his commitment to a white, unified Europe.

Dugin as a theoretician of Aryanness

Among the first themes directly inspired by the Nazi tradition is Dugin's belief in the existence of spiritual races and an Aryan genealogy for Russians. In the 1930s, the Nazi intelligentsia was divided between those who advanced a purely biological definition of race – often calling for a narrow definition that limited

Aryanness to the Germanic peoples – and those giving preference to race as a spiritual principle, who often promoted a wider definition of who could claim the prestige of the Aryan lineage.[62] This doctrinal difference had political consequences: the supporters of spiritual racism, dreaming of a totalitarian application of the race principle, despised those trying to apply "pragmatic" racial principles. They were therefore critical of the Nazi racial policy not because they wanted it to stop, but because they hoped to make it more radical.

Along with the thinker Julius Evola (1898–1974), a disciple of the founder of the metaphysical school of Traditionalism René Guénon (1886–1951), Dugin belongs to the spiritual racism camp: he believes that races are the "soul" of peoples,[63] endowing them with innate qualities that reveal certain philosophical principles.[64] Building on the 2004 debate between Andreas Umland and A. James Gregor,[65] I disagree with the latter's view of Evola as a non-fascist author and side with Umland: Evola criticized the Italian fascist regime in the name of an even more radical understanding of spiritual racism and a belief that the Nazi regime was ideologically superior to, and more genuinely fascist than, the Italian one he despised. As Evola himself stated, "We would like a fascism more radical, more intrepid, a truly absolute fascism, made of pure force, inaccessible to any compromise."[66]

Dugin's only in-depth article on Evola was included in one of his first publications in 1991, the almanac *Giperboreia (Hyperborea*). An article by Ernesto Milá, a notorious Spanish neo-Nazi, that also appeared in this volume explores Evola's theories before and during World War II, his influence on the NSDAP and the Waffen-SS, his role in diffusing Nazi precepts among Italian fascists, and his admiration for the Romanian Iron Guard. Dugin's own article is devoted to postwar Evolian thought and his two main books, *Men Among the Ruins: Post-War Reflections of a Radical Traditionalist* (1953) and *Ride the Tiger: A Survival Manual for the Aristocrats of the Soul* (1961). Dugin supports the Italian thinker's theory of a cosmic racial war:

> History is not a blind, determined process or a random game; it is a huge spiritual war between two principled positions, an arena of the struggle between angels and demons, and the objects of this history are not men, but superhuman and subhuman forces.[67]

The almanac *Giperboreia*, entirely devoted to esoteric Nazism, largely reproduced a journal of the same name published by the Spanish group Thule, a direct descendant of the neo-Nazi CEDADE (Spanish Circle of Friends of Europe).[68] The Russian edition begins by endorsing the post-1945 Nazi slogan, "Nothing is lost! After the deluge, the future belongs to us!"[69] It opens with a text from the Chilean fascist thinker Miguel Serrano (1917–2009) devoted to cosmic war between castes, where he states: "Remember with Novalis that all men are not equal, and that it is not enough to have a human face in order to claim the title of human being."[70] A Chilean diplomat, Serrano was an important theoretician of anti-modernism. He defined his ideology as "esoteric Hitlerism," inspired by

Gnosticism, with anti-Semitic conspiracy theories that he reproduced using elements inspired by Hindu traditions and references to Aryan descendants of Hyperborea.[71] Serrano returned to Chile after the Pinochet coup in 1973 and criticized the new regime for being too centrist. Dugin remained faithful to Serrano, continuing to quote him into the late 2000s.

According to Dugin, Eurasia is a racial synthesis between Whites (the Indo-European Slavs) and Yellows (the Finno-Turkic peoples). Borrowing from the father of Slavophilism, Aleksei Khomiakov, he calls them the Frisian and the Finnish principles: the "Whites/Frisians" are associated with internal freedom and esotericism; the "Yellows/Finnish" correspond to tyranny and exoticism. The hybrid nature of Eurasia, simultaneously white and yellow, predestines the continent to a worldwide role, because:

> the Turkic peoples of Siberia have often perceived the Russians as "continuing" or "resuming" the mission of Genghis Khan himself. […] Aristocratic marriages served not only to establish family or ethnic ties between the Russians and the Turkic peoples, but secretly presupposed a transfer of the sacral geographic doctrine of the Turks to the Slavic elite, which in its turn had preserved the memory of its Nordic origins.[72]

Yet Eurasia as a racial synthesis remains a minor theme in Dugin's work; the notion of Russians' pure Aryanness largely predominates. Dugin refers regularly, for instance, to Guido von List (1848–1919) and Jörg Lanz von Liebenfels (1874–1954), the famous thinkers of Germanic Aryanism, and even more frequently to Hermann Wirth, one of his favorite authors. For him, Wirth is the "great unknown" and a simple "German patriot"[73] who should not be judged responsible for the mistakes of the Nazi regime. In *The Hyperborean Theory* (*Giperboreiskaia teoriia*, 1993) and *The Philosophy of Traditionalism* (*Filosofiia traditsionalizma*, 2002), Dugin professes his belief in the genuineness of Wirth's discovery of the original language of mankind. A kind of Aryan Grail, written in a universal, runic proto-language, was supposedly discovered and published by Wirth in 1933 under the title *Chronicle of Ura-Linda*.[74]

In *Mysteries of Eurasia* (*Misterii Evrazii*, 1991), Dugin presents Siberia and its Nordic continental mass as the original cradle of Aryans, as well as the magical center of the world, following the idea that "the continents have a symbolic significance."[75] He states:

> Thousands of years ago, our land welcomed the descendants of the Arctic [meaning a hypothetical Atlantis-like Arctic continent], the founders of the Hindu and Iranian civilizations. We (especially as Orthodox believers) are direct heirs of the Arctic, of its ancient tradition."[76]

Dugin advances various occultist lines of reasoning in favor of this Hyperborean theory, drawing on the mystique of alphabets, sounds, numbers, geometric symbols, references to the Kabbalah, alchemy, Hermeticism, Gnosticism, astrology,

and so forth. He defines this set of theories as sacred geography (*sakral'naia geografiia*), that is to say the science of the secrets of world history, of the enigmas of ancient civilizations and continents, and of the origin of races, religions, and old mythologies.[77]

Dugin has never ceased to promote these Aryan myths. In 2008, he published a revised and expanded version of his two books devoted to Aryan theories, *Mysteries of Eurasia* and *The Hyperborean Theory*, under the title *Signs from the Great North* (*Znaki velikogo norda*). To follow the broader trend of anchoring Aryan leitmotifs in Orthodoxy, Dugin declares that the "original Hyperborean tradition" should in fact be named "polar Christianity."[78] Yet more recently, in a 2013 issue of the Izborskii Club's journal, *Russkie strategii*, Dugin reveals himself as a paradoxical denigrator of Russia's traditional multi-ethnicity – which, if he were faithful to his professed Eurasianist faith, he should be defending. He denounces the old saying "Scratch a Russian and you will find a Tatar" as a "pseudo-historical Russophobic myth" that could be easily refuted because genetic analyses have found little presence of Tatar or Mongol genes among Russians, while supporting the dominance of the Slavic-Aryan type.[79] Here again, the Aryan racial motive remains central in his worldview, overshadowing the Eurasianist tradition.

The centrality of Dugin's Aryanist stance is similarly perceptible in his attitude toward Jews and the "Jewish question." Geopolitically, the Russian thinker defends a strategic alliance with Israel, derived from the idea of a distinction between "good" and "bad" Judaism that was developed by the first Eurasianists, in particular Iakov Bromberg (1898–1948),[80] and is common among the European New Right. In Dugin's view, the "good" Jews are the citizens of Israel, aware of their irreducible Jewish specificity and fighting to preserve it; the "bad" ones are those who continue to live in the diaspora and seek to be assimilated by the surrounding cultures.[81] Dugin thus displays geopolitical philo-Zionism combined with philosophical anti-Semitism. While he regularly criticizes the vulgar anti-Semitism espoused by most currents of Russian nationalism, he expounds a more sophisticated and euphemized version of anti-Semitism.

He attempts, for instance, to erase the common historical roots between Judaism and Christianity, and accuses the Jewish world of having inspired a biological conception of itself. He both rejects and admires the Jews' alleged capacity for conceiving of themselves as a race. Thus, according to Dugin, Israel is the archetypal example of a state founded on an ethnic or racial principle – born of the Holocaust, of course, but also having contributed to the creation of the drama to which the Jews fell victim. Hence Dugin's statement that German racism and Jewish messianism are two forms of "ethnic eschatologism," an ideological pair in which it is difficult to know which caused the other. To him, their polarity is a sign of their intimate correlation[82] – an ambivalent argument often used to accuse Jews of some responsibility for the Holocaust.

Evola-inspired spiritual racism noticeably shapes Dugin's definition of the opposition between a supposed Jewish spiritual principle and the Russian one. The world would be divided into subject races, such as Russians, and object

races, such as Jews. It goes without saying that the choice of terminology – subject and object, borrowed from twentieth-century philosophy – is a way of subtly inferring notions of superiority and inferiority.[83] According to Dugin, "from the point of view of Orthodox esotericism, Judaism and the Kabbalah are without doubt the counter-initiation,"[84] since for Jews, the cosmos is God's place of exile, whereas in Christianity, it is the place willed by God. Jews are thus not only different from Aryans, but it is also impossible for them to assimilate. This irreconcilable difference foreshadows, Dugin states, the coming metaphysical war between the Aryan and Semitic worlds:

> The world of Judaica is a world that is hostile to us. But a sense of Aryan justice and the gravity of our geopolitical situation require us to comprehend its laws and its interests. Today, the Indo-European elite is facing a titanic task: to understand those who are different from us not only culturally, nationally and politically, but also metaphysically. And in this case, to understand does not mean to forgive, but to vanquish.[85]

Once again, Dugin's spiritual anti-Semitism is not a product of the early 1990s that might have faded away by the 2000s. Dugin has not ceased to criticize the "subversive forces" of Judaism and Free Masonry, and the Ukrainian crisis only rejuvenated this anti-Semitic language (see Chapter 9). In July 2016, he reposted a four-minute video on his Facebook account "explaining" the "Rothschild conspiracy": the Jewish banking family supposedly corrupted the United States, compelling it to engage in war against countries where the family had failed to take control of the local banking system.[86] On Western far-right websites, Dugin continues to condemn "cosmopolitan financial elites" and extends support to a certain intellectualized white nationalism, but refuses any call to concrete violence:

> When white nationalists reaffirm Tradition and the ancient culture of European peoples, they are right. But when they attack immigrants, Muslims, or the nationalists of other countries […] or when they defend the United States, Atlanticism, liberalism or modernity, or when they consider the white race as being the highest and other races as inferior, I disagree with them completely.[87]

Promoting the iconic philosophical figures of Nazism

For years, Dugin had Julius Evola, German *Geopolitik* theoreticians such as Karl Haushofer, and Conservative Revolution ideologists like Ernst Niekisch as his main references. He progressively added new figures to this intellectual pantheon, all of whom are intimately linked to the Nazi philosophical background: Carl Schmitt, Mircea Eliade, Carl Jung, and, first among equals, Martin Heidegger. These figures cannot, obviously, be associated solely with Nazism; rather, each of them brought new concepts into their respective disciplines and

garnered intellectual legitimacy. However, their presence in Dugin's doctrinal arsenal is no coincidence, especially as he systematically promotes them within a certain underlying ideological context.

Dugin dedicated an entire book, *Philosophy of War* (*Filosofiia voiny*), to Carl Schmitt (1888–1985) in 2004, as well as several chapters of *The Fourth Political Theory* in 2009. Schmitt's notion of "political theology," according to which most political concepts are secular versions of Christian theology, has profoundly influenced postwar political philosophy. Although Schmitt has become a fashionable author in the West and has inspired some American neo-conservatives, he is also known for playing a central role in the academic legitimation of Nazism. A lawyer by training, he joined the NSDAP in 1933, participated in burning books deemed decadent or contrary to the German spirit, approved cleansing German universities of "Jewish thought," legitimized the Night of the Long Knives, presided over the Union of National Socialist Jurists, and was named State Councilor for Prussia by Hermann Göring. His theoretical work, chiefly on "authority" (*Auctoritas*) and the notions of "total war" *(totale Krieg)* and "large spaces" (*Grossraum*), shaped some of Nazism's philosophical principles.[88] Although Dugin mentions "auctoritas" and "total war" only in passing, he offers a more detailed treatment of "large spaces" with the goal of justifying Russia's imperial claims. For Dugin, Schmitt does not have to be associated with Nazism:

> The National Socialism of Carl Schmitt is different from that of Hitler or Rosenberg because Schmitt thinks in terms of peoples, not of a German or Aryan people […] He thinks of "large spaces" as a harmonious coexistence of several empires, including the Russian-Soviet or Eurasian ones, not as Germanic colonization.[89]

In his *Sociology of Imagination* (*Sotsiologiia voobrazheniia*, 2010), as well as in several other texts, Dugin also celebrated Mircea Eliade (1907–1986), whose works profoundly influenced the sociology of religion and myths, in particular concerning the distinction between the sacred and the profane. In developing mythological thinking, Eliade indirectly drew inspiration from Guénon and Evola.[90] But he was also a fervent supporter of the Iron Guard in 1930s–1940s Romania, praised the fascist ideology of the movement, and enrolled in Totul pentru Țară, the political arm of the Iron Guard. During World War II, Eliade traveled across occupied Europe to support occupation regimes and celebrated the establishment of the Salazar regime in Portugal.[91] Dugin also referred on several occasions to Carl Jung (1875–1961), a Swiss psychiatrist and psychotherapist who founded analytical psychology and published texts psychoanalyzing the Nazi regime through references to German mythology.[92] Unlike Freud, who left Germany, Jung stayed, meaning he had to reach an accommodation with the Nazi regime. In 1933, he became president of the General Medical Society for Psychotherapy and selected the professed Nazi sympathizer Gustav Richard Heyer as his vice-president, but he tried to allow Jewish analysts to continue their work by establishing an individual membership category.[93]

In the late 2000s, Dugin "converted" to Heideggerianism, making the German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) his new idol. Interested by him since the early 1990s, he was then more critical of the German philosopher and polemicized with Alain de Benoist over his appreciation of his doctrinal principles.[94] Since then, Dugin, like all new converts, has displayed unbridled passion for his new master. In 2014, he made the Gramsci-esque declaration that philosophy shapes politics, not vice versa: "In 20 years, we will hear that Hitler and Mussolini were political figures who lived in the era of Evola and Heidegger."[95] The link between his preferred philosophers and the fascist and Nazi regimes confirms that in Dugin's world, ideas are considered the driving forces beyond politics – a self-serving statement.

Dugin's interest in Heidegger came about as a result of major Western debates on the role of the German philosopher in introducing some Nazi concepts into philosophy.[96] It has long been known that Heidegger was, for a few months in 1933, the rector of the University of Freiburg and a member of the NSDAP, and that he held anti-Semitic views – widespread at that time.[97] But the publication, at the beginning of 2014, of his *Black Notebooks*, written under the Nazi regime, cast these propensities into relief, confirming how much of Heidegger's philosophy was intrinsically bonded to Nazi ideology.[98] Heidegger engaged in a pitiless and persistent critique of the West and its essential values: reason, individualism, humanism, and republicanism. He defended a metapolitics of national socialism that he hoped would accomplish "a total transformation of our German *Dasein*." Heidegger also applauded the links uniting his own philosophy of existence with the Nazi worldview, specifically the notion of "rootedness in the soil" (*Bodenständigkeit*) and the denunciation of "world Jewry" (*Weltjudentum*).[99] In one of his texts, *The Rectorship 1933–34: Facts and Thoughts*, the German philosopher insisted that he grew disappointed with Nazism after the Night of the Long Knives, when Röhm's SA was decimated by Hitler,[100] thus positioning himself firmly within the leftist Nazi tradition that Dugin has long sought to rehabilitate.

Between 2006 and 2014, Dugin translated at least seven of Heidegger's books into Russian.[101] Just as importantly, he wrote two books about Heideggerianism, *Martin Heidegger: Philosophy of the Other Origin* and *Martin Heidegger: The Possibility of a Russian Philosophy*, published in 2010 and 2011, respectively.[102] Dugin follows Heidegger's precept that Western philosophy has arrived at its logical end, but he disassociates Russian philosophy from this, arguing that the latter's archaic traits have preserved it from modern Western decadence. According to Dugin, Heidegger theorized the West's exhaustion and the need for a revival coming from the East and for a new ontology of revolution. He gives a geopolitical reading of Heidegger's central concept of *Dasein*, according to which all philosophy is a description of experience or "being," not a purely abstract construct. He applies *Dasein* to Russian philosophy, whose core mission would be to describe the Russian experience and legitimate Russia's perception of the world. Following the German philosopher, Dugin refers to Dostoevskii; he also insists on Heidegger's perception of the United States as the terminal

expression of Western culture and Russia as the new dawn that will soon emerge.[103] Like Heidegger, Dugin is a master of words: he crafts new concepts and develops complex sentences playing on words, sonorities, meanings, and *Zeitgeist*. On many points, he is at ease with Heidegger's own volatile vocabulary and can appropriate and russify it.

The tabula rasa principle: legitimizing apocalyptical violence

Another critical element of Dugin's intrinsically fascist persuasion is his relationship to violence. He cultivates his image as a *gosudarstvennik* (statist) fighting for Russia's great-power reassertion. His statements about Russia as the pivot of a Eurasian empire position him within the statist tradition. However, his ideological stance is more paradoxical than it would seem at first glance: Dugin also belongs to a revolutionary tradition that battles against state power. He has nurtured his aura in countercultural circles such as Limonov's National Bolshevik Party (see Chapter 7) and continues to train young paramilitary groups via its Eurasianist Youth Movement.

Dugin has praised violence in several of his publications. In 1992, in one of his first articles in *Den'*, he wrote, "To preserve our empire, for the freedom of Eurasia, we should be ready to fight and to die."[104] Like all fascists, Dugin admires the Romantic taste for death and combat, is contemptuous of contemporary society – which he believes to be bourgeois and decadent – and aspires to form young, purified generations:

> The ideal Eurasian is a strong, healthy, and beautiful person who has passionarity (*passionarnost'*) and passion and is ready to take responsibility and perform heroic deeds and feats, who is prepared for trials and victories and for great love and a happy family life, ready to continue his line and lead a fulfilled and simultaneously pious life. […] Our ideal is to create good physical and moral health, strength, valor, and fidelity, and take pride in honorable goals.[105]

The journals *Elementy* and *Milyi Angel*, published in the 1990s, as well as Dugin's Internet sites, were filled with strong military symbolism and sometimes exhibited muscular, weapons-laden, and khaki-clad bodies.

This permanent tension between the promotion of a totalitarian state, on the one hand, and the exaltation of revolutionary violence as a symbol of humanity's animal nature and its capacity to face death, on the other, is typical of all fascist premises. Dugin therefore reproduces classical stereotypes by proclaiming, "A fascist hates intellectuals, in whom he sees hidden bourgeois, pretentious merchants, talkative and irresponsible cowards. A fascist loves what is animal, supra-human, and angelic at the same time."[106] In *Philosophy of War*, he endorses the regenerative properties of war. The book's subtitle is unequivocal: "One who is not ready to fight and die cannot really live."[107] The back cover takes a similar tack:

> The value of peoples, cultures, and societies is proved in war and through it … The beautiful is what has as its foundation the accomplishment of self-affirmation. War renews Man, and the price to pay for this gigantic personal effort confirms his adherence to the community. War has always been a collective business, having as its goal the conservation of the people and the state, the growth of their power, of their space, and of their life regions. Herein lies the social and national significance of war.[108]

More recently, in 2014, excited by the war in Ukraine, Dugin revived his call for action:

> Traditionalism is not valid without policy. Who claims the contrary is a sheep and a scoundrel. To live in the world and be content with anti-tradition and peripheral hallucinations of Hyperborea and the Golden Age, this will not work. If you are a traditionalist, change the world, challenge the surrounding filth – democracy, human rights, liberalism, materialism, egalitarian ideas and parties – and erase it from the face of the earth. Conquer or die.[109]

Although Dugin does not explicitly call for terrorist actions, he mentions his attraction to the "metaphysical genesis of terrorism."[110] In 1997, he wrote and presented a weekly one-hour radio broadcast, *Finis Mundi*, which was canned after he commented favorably on the early twentieth-century Russian terrorist Boris Savinkov (1879–1925).[111] Yet he is most interested in the fertile soil offered by Italy in the 1960s and 1970s. In his writings, he lingers more on the leftist terrorism of Prima Linea and its founder, Enrico Galmozzi,[112] than on the far right, and has also referred to the "anarcho-primitivism" of John Zerzan.[113] Nevertheless, one may assume that Dugin is actually more influenced by far-right terrorism. He knows well Evola's role in mentoring Italian radical groups and their leaders, in particular Franco Giorgio Freda (1941), whose conviction in the Piazza Fontana bombing was later overturned due to a lack of evidence. This far-right terrorist tradition also influenced one of Dugin's closest allies in Italy, Claudio Mutti (1946), the most famous Italian representative of the New Right. Mutti defended Freda, then praised the Libyan regime of Colonel Muammar Qaddafi, whom he saw as an Islamic embodiment of Traditionalism, and converted to Islam.[114] Dugin also mentioned the Islamist experience of Hizbollah in an article devoted to "Fatherland and Death," and admires the sacrificial nature of Shia terrorism:

> We need a NEW PARTY. A party of death. A party of the total vertical. A Party of God, a Russian equivalent to Hizbollah that would act according to wholly different rules and pursue entirely different projects. For the system, death is indeed the end. For a normal person it is only a beginning.[115]

Last but not least, Dugin rehabilitated the controversial figure Baron Roman von Ungern-Sternberg (1885–1921), an aristocrat of Germano-Baltic origin and

White lieutenant general who committed bloody mass atrocities during the Russian civil war. In 1911, as a general in the Tsarist army, he fought against the Chinese republicans in Mongolia alongside the Mongol nationalist movement, which favored the restoration of the Qing monarchy. He then allied with the White Admiral Kolchak (1874–1920) and, in 1919, became the right-hand man of Ataman Grigorii Semenov (1890–1946), leader of the Transbaikal Cossacks. When the latter fled to the Pacific via Manchuria, Ungern-Sternberg opted to remain in Mongolia. He formed a division with around a thousand Cossacks – of diverse nationalities – in the hope of galvanizing Siberia against Bolshevik power. Inspired by Russian Silver Age philosopher Vladimir Soloviev, he thought that the Mongols' mission was to destroy Europe, and he converted to Buddhism as a sign of protest against the 1917 Revolution, which he saw as a portentous sign of the bankruptcy of Western civilization. He succeeded in taking Urga in February 1921, liberating the Mongols' capital from the Chinese army. He restored the "living Buddha," Bogdo Gegen, to the throne, and received the title of Chin-vang, reserved for the descendants of Genghis Khan; he even married a Manchu princess. With the support of the Dalai Lama, he claimed to be working for the victory of Buddhism and was recognized by some lamas as the reincarnation of Mahākāla, the protective divinity of the yellow hat. In May 1921, however, the Bolsheviks took Urga and captured and executed Ungern-Sternberg.

Dugin liked the metaphor represented by the baron, and started publishing under this pseudonym in the almanac *Giperboreia* in 1991.[116] In 2012, he returned to his idol, organizing a lecture at the New University (see p. 119) to celebrate the baron's birthday.[117] Ungern-Sternberg embodied Dugin's call for empire and the realization of Russia's Eurasian destiny in Asia, as well as his metaphysics of violence. The baron's irreverent and provocative character matches the apocalyptic claims with which Dugin likes to be identified.

Paramilitary training for young Eurasianists

This cult of violence is amplified by Dugin's youth movement, the Eurasianist Union of Youth (*Evraziiskii soiuz molodezhi*, ESM). Launched in 2005 in response to the Orange Revolution, its political program, Russia-3, calls for the reconstitution of a multinational Russian Empire.[118] The ESM gained visibility very quickly, at a time when nationalist youths were still poorly organized. In 2005, it used the Day of National Unity, on November 4, to launch the first nationalist march. At that time, it was called the Right-Wing March (*Pravyi marsh*), but in 2006 it took the name Russian March (*Russkii marsh*), with the goal of moving from a rightist to a more consensual "Russian" brand. The ESM quickly lost its control over the event to Belov's Movement against Illegal Immigration-DPNI (see Chapter 7). One of the ESM's distinctive features has been its opening of affiliates – in reality, very small groups of local sympathizers – in several neighboring states: Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. The ESM has always considered Ukraine its main battlefield: it

organized the desecration of Ukrainian state symbols located on Mount Hoverla; attacked the Ukrainian cultural center in Moscow, which at the time was hosting an exhibition devoted to the famine of 1930; launched a cyberattack against the Ukrainian president's website; and invited the Ukrainian people to rise up against the regime in Kyiv. The Ukrainian authorities countered by banning the movement from the country and labeling Dugin and then-ESM leader Pavel Zarifullin *personae non grata*.[119]

The ESM narrative is peppered with war metaphors. The movement claims to represent "the squadrons of the Eurasian revolution," says it wants to "create a new army," and speaks of a "great purge."[120] ESM members often define themselves as *oprichniki*.[121] To bring these war metaphors to life, the ESM has organized several training camps for the so-called anti-Orange movement, as well as responding to attacks from competitors such as the Limonovtsy.[122] ESM summer camps have been held every year. In 2005 and 2006, they hosted 30 young boys and girls for four-to-five days in a small town in the Vladimir region whose mayor was an Eurasianist sympathizer.[123] In 2007 they organized a larger camp in Crimea and boasted that some 700 young people attended, mostly Ukrainian Russians (although the available photographs confirm the presence of large crowds, it is difficult to ascertain the exact number of participants).[124] Two summer camps were organized in 2008, one in central Russia (called the "Serb camp" because it hosted young Serbs from Kosovo, where the ESM had started an affiliate[125]) and the other in North Ossetia, just a few weeks before the August war between Russia and Georgia. Again, the group was relatively large and likely comprised of young Ossetian members of the local Socialist Party, a co-organizer of the camp.[126]

During ESM summer camps, young participants study Eurasianist doctrine, Russian history, and Orthodoxy, and sometimes undertake more practical political training, such as in election monitoring or party analysis. Outdoor activities are an obvious priority, including training for street demonstrations (how to spread slogans, organize a security presence, and resist police attacks). Past instructors include Oleg Bakhtiarov (1948), one of the founders of the ESM in Ukraine and director of the so-called University of Effective Development[127] in Kyiv, where he teaches the murky discipline of "psychonetics" and psychological manipulation. At the summer camps, Bakhtiarov is in charge of training for "extreme situations." He likely applies the experience he acquired in 1993 while defending the Supreme Soviet from President Boris Yeltsin's forces as a part of General Makashov's private security forces.[128]

In 2009, a merger between the ESM and Dugin's MSU Center for Conservative Research reshaped summer camp activities. Priority was given to a three-day summer "sociological camp" that accommodated fewer than 30 young students. The atmosphere also changed. Attendees were a bit older than typical ESM campers, and the emphasis shifted to lectures and training in sociology and applied psychology, rather than urban warfare.[129] In 2012, the ESM held its congress and summer camps simultaneously, with about a hundred participants. Little information is available, but again, priority seems to have been placed on

lectures by MSU professors and political culture, with less emphasis on paramilitary training.[130] A major turning point for the ESM came in 2013, when it participated in the Nashi-led Seliger summer camp.[131] For the ESM, the peak of the event was the moment when Vladimir Putin, on a visit to Seliger, responded to a question about the future of the Eurasian Union posed by ESM leader Andrei Kovalenko; this tacit endorsement allowed the movement to present itself as fully toeing the Putin line.[132] Although ESM recruitment has gentrified with the progressive intellectualization of its activities, its original purpose – a revolutionary movement promoting urban warfare training – did not disappear entirely; it was merely delegated to other branches of activities, each assigned to a different youth development program.

The more intellectual component has been partly captured by the Eurasianist Youth (*Evraziiskaia molodezh'*) of Pavel Zarifullin (1977), who split from ESM in 2009 because of personal conflicts with Dugin as well as with his young lieutenants, Leonid Savin and Valerii Korovin. Today, Zarifullin simply states that Dugin was "too far to the right" for him.[133] He advocates keeping Eurasianism faithful to its original multinational, more leftist traditions and moving away from Dugin's fascist theories. Zarifullin launched the website geopolitics.ru, a rival to Savin's geopolitica.ru, with the slogan "Contemporary geopolitics without beards," a sly reference to the fact that Dugin, Savin, and Korovin all wear beards in the style of Old Believers.[134] Zarifullin runs a small Lev Gumilev center in Moscow celebrating Eurasianism's founding fathers[135] and participates in many so-called Eurasianist initiatives – music festivals, ethnological expeditions, and the like – devoted to Eurasia's cultural diversity. In his book *The New Scythians* (*Novye skify*, 2014), he proclaims Scythianism to be a new regenerative force that will restore Russia's place in the world[136] and, like Dugin, claims to offer a "fourth political theory," which Zarifullin contradictorily defines as "imperial anarchism" (*imperskii anarkhizm*).[137] The success of the movement is very limited: it has a few dozen supporters, with some visibility among Russian youth in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.[138]

At the other end of the Eurasianist spectrum are the Eurasian Falangists, a small faction created in 2012. Unlike Zarifullin's New Scythians, they did not secede from the Eurasianist mainstream and are linked directly to the ESM. Whereas the New Scythians repackage Eurasianist doctrine, the Falangists rehabilitate fascism, National Bolshevism, and esoteric Nazism, and they openly call for violence. They present themselves as a "community of spiritual knights" (*dukhovno-rytsarskoe sodruzhestvo*)[139] and refer to the Spanish Falangists of the Franco-era Falange Española de las Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional Sindicalista (FE de las JONS), as well as to more contemporary heirs, such as the Falange Auténtica, Falange Española Independiente, and FE–La Falange. On their website, the Falangists feature several articles on Onesimo Redondo (1905–1936) and José Antonio Primo de Rivera (1903–1936), the two main theorists and leaders of Falangism.[140] The Eurasianist Falangists appear to be led, or at least supervised, by the journalist Mikhail Moshkin (1979), a writer for *Moskovskie novosti*, and affiliated with the "Inter-Traditional" movement of Maksim

Borozenets, a Russian émigré in Denmark who has created a "secret order" called Ordo Botozemelis, as well as a small group, Nordsolen, that promotes Hyperborean theories.[141] Moshkin often writes for neo-pagan and Aryan websites such as Arthania,[142] extolling the false epic the *Book of Veles* and Wirth's *Chronicle of Ura-Linda*. The Falangist website reflects the esoteric Nazi aesthetics of Dugin's first journals, such as *Milyi Angel* and *Elementy*.

Calls for a white, unified Europe and links with the US Alt-Right

In his fight against Atlanticism, Dugin is convinced that Europe must unify – at any cost. The idea of European unification was first promoted during the 1930s by the Europeanist faction within the Waffen-SS and then supported by many European collaborationist groups during the war years. Today, all far-right groups that call for withdrawal from the European Union demand a "Europe of nations." Dugin is singing from the same hymnal. He justifies the decision of individuals like Thiriart to collaborate with the Nazi regime by arguing that "his support for the German Reich was based on his understanding of the need for Europe to unify at any price."[143] Today, Dugin continues to vehemently favor a European unity that would include Russia. During the Ukrainian crisis, he declared with pathos:

> Our revolution will not stop in Western Ukraine. It must go further in Europe. […] Europe faces a Revolution in both cases: if we, Russians, win, and if we stop somewhere under NATO pressure. If we win, we will begin the expansion of liberation [from American] ideology into Europe. It is the goal of full Eurasianism – Europe from Lisbon to Vladivostok. A Great Eurasian Continental Empire. And we will build it. This means the European Revolution will be a Eurasian Revolution. This is our last horizon.[144]

This framing allows Dugin to share the vocabulary of the current European far right and New Right movements: both visualize a regenerated Europe, detached from US influence, proud of its white and Christian (or neo-pagan) identity, and of which Russia would be an integral part. This stance can also be understood by the fact that Dugin owes a great deal to his European connections. All of his early texts published in *Giperboreia*, *Elementy*, and *Milyi Angel* are transcriptions of knowledge accumulated in the course of his travels in Western Europe between 1989 and 1993, during which he met the leading names of the European New Right: in France, Alain de Benoist, the founder of GRECE, as well as Christian Bouchet and Jean Parvulesco; in Italy, Claudio Mutti; in Belgium, Jean-François Thiriart; in Spain, Isidro J. Palacios and Francesc Sánchez-Bas, members of the defunct neo-Nazi CEDADE.[145]

His interactions with New Right and fascist groups in Western Europe slowed in the second half of the 1990s and early 2000s, but intensified at the end of the last decade, and are now one of Dugin's hallmarks. His first phase of fusion with his European counterparts centered on New Right classical themes and the

discovery of esoteric Nazism. The second phase centers on the broader unifying theme of the defense of supposed European "traditional values." In 2012, for instance, defending the new anti-gay law in Russia, Dugin declared: "Liberalism insists on freedom and liberation from any form of collective identity. […] Liberals have liberated the human being from national identity, religious identity, and so on. The last kind of collective identity is gender."[146] He thus supports the Russian government's stance, as Russia "is not a liberal country, nor does it pretend to be such," and thus it refuses "to apply liberal ideology in the form of obligatory laws, against normalization and juridical legitimization of what is considered a moral and psychological perversion."[147]

This aspirational Europe heralds two values: white identity and traditional social mores. These allow Russia to appear not as a knockoff of Europe, but as its vanguard. Dugin thus fits completely within this pan-European movement and thinks of himself as its Russian representative. In 2013, receiving Gábor Vona, the leader of the Hungarian far-right party Jobbik, he introduced him with a profession of faith about the "authentic" Europe:

> We usually perceive Europe as a paradise of liberal values, but there is another Europe [that] has nothing to do with the main European agenda. This is a Europe of values, traditions, of healthy Christian attitudes. This is a Europe of family traditions, a Europe of roots, and it is actually a European Europe, which is unknown to us, and instead we are given a substitute – some sort of "Americanized" Europe, a quasi-Europe, and we are told that there is no other Europe. This is the Europe that Russia needs to deal with, of course, from which it can learn a lot and gain many useful things in a dialogue.[148]

The United States is likewise part of the white world Dugin favors, but his geopolitical opposition to "Atlanticism" makes the relationship much more challenging than that with the European far right.[149]

Notwithstanding these trials, Dugin has been building ideological and personal linkages with some figures from the US Alt-Right, a term that refers to a loose aggregation of white supremacists trying to refresh the movement's image in order to appear as a credible alternative to the Republican Party. The Alt-Right movement's leader, Richard Spencer (1978), has attempted to renew the doctrinal stock of American white supremacism by moving away from the Klan's WASP-centric narrative to call for the defense of all white Americans (including Catholics) and by adding migrants and Muslims to the list of enemies.[150] Spencer leads the National Policy Institute, an organization launched in 2005 and described by the Southern Poverty Law Center as "a suit-and-tie version of the white supremacists of old, a kind of professional racist in khakis."[151] Largely inspired by the French New Right, like Dugin, Spencer believes in metapolitics and therefore considers Klan-like traditional white supremacism to be outdated: the conquest of politics happens not on the street but in the cultural realm and the marketplace of ideas. Trump's victory in the

2016 elections put wind in the sails of the Alt-Right, but its main public figure, Steve Bannon (1953), former executive chairman of the Alt-Right website Breitbart News, rapidly resigned from his position as White House chief strategist, a departure that heralded the White House's turn toward a more classical Republican framing of domestic and foreign policy issues.[152]

Many Alt-Right figures are big fans of Putin, whom they see as a beacon for the white world.[153] They are attracted to his rejection of "decadent" American liberalism and multiculturalism, hard line against Islamic radicalism, upholding of Christian values, criticism of Western political correctness, and support for the idea that global elites conspire against ordinary people. Steve Bannon, for instance, declared in 2014, "We, the Judeo-Christian West, really have to look at what [Putin] is talking about as far as traditionalism goes, particularly the sense of where it supports the underpinnings of nationalism."[154] Yet the honeymoon with Russia is far from total: though Bannon has referred to Dugin and Putin positively, he considers the Putin regime kleptocratic and Dugin too open to the Islamic world.[155] He has also denounced "Putin's cynical denial of responsibility" for the actions of his proxies in Crimea.[156] Very often, he mentions Dugin only to say that the Russian thinker has quoted Julius Evola, who is one of Bannon's key references.[157]

Several Alt-Right websites – such as Open Revolt, Green Star, New Resistance, and AlternativeRight.com – regularly publish Dugin's main texts in English for American audiences. The White Power activist Preston Wiginton (1965) invited him to give a Skype lecture at Texas A&M University in 2015,[158] although very few people showed up. Matthew Heimbach (1991), leader of the self-proclaimed Traditionalist Worker Party, who has originated hashtags such as #HailPutin and #PutinForTsar,[159] held a conference in California broadcasting a video in which Dugin emphasized the "common struggle" of Americans and Russians.[160] Dugin was also interviewed by American conspiracist Alex Jones (1974) for his website Infowars in February 2017,[161] just a few months after Dugin interviewed Jones.[162] This is the most dissemination a Russian thinker can hope for in the United States. Spencer's Russian ex-wife, Nina Kouprianova, who published under the nom de plume Nina Byzantina, has translated Dugin's two books on Martin Heidegger into English and published a blog on "meta- and geopolitics" inspired by him. An apologist of the Putin regime (and the Novorossiya project), she has distanced herself from her ex-husband's racist theories.[163] Spencer himself published a pro-Trump text celebrating the approaching new world order on the Katekhon website, of which Dugin is one of the main editors.[164] As we can see, bridges with the US exist, but they remain marginal and are not to be compared to those with Europe.

Dugin: mainstream or marginal?

In assessing Dugin's relevance, one has to answer two questions: Has he been successful in promoting fascism in Russia? Can he be considered a mainstream thinker? In both cases, I would answer in the negative.

Dugin's greatest success in reaching a genuinely broad audience dates back to two decades ago, with his *Foundations of Geopolitics*. That Dugin played a driving role in promoting geopolitics as a respectable discipline in the Russian university system, and in giving the broader public a geopolitical vision of Russia's great-power status, is beyond doubt. His book has been included in many university curricula for years. He also contributed to spreading the notion of Eurasia as a synonym for Russia's regional and international status. Yet the term was progressively appropriated by the Presidential Administration, without Dugin getting any personal bonus for it; on the contrary, he was deprived of this paternity, and the term was appropriated by other Eurasia proponents, such as Sergei Glaziev, adviser to the President of the Russian Federation on regional economic integration, who are better integrated into the mainstream and offer a less esoteric and more pragmatic reading of the term. Moreover, if Dugin was a "trendy" author in the second half of the 1990s, he progressively lost his popular appeal. With 36,000 followers, his Twitter account is dramatically under-followed for a figure who claims to be an ideological agenda-setter. Looking at bestseller lists, it seems that readers have largely bypassed his books in favor of those by new authors within the nationalist and conservative *publitsistika* tradition, such as Nikolai Starikov.

Dugin's fascist doctrines remain largely untouched by this success and have not been able to gain broader visibility, influencing only a small group of people, mostly in countercultural circles. This outreach is primarily done by websites, as well as by the so-called New University – launched in 1998 on Dugin's initiative – which diffuses traditionalist ideas through classes with former Iuzhinskii Circle leaders, such as Iurii Mamleev (1931–2015), Evgenii Golovin (1938–2010), and Geidar Dzhemal – all now deceased. Dugin pompously presents himself as the provost (*rektor*) of the New University,[165] yet it takes just one look at the structure of the New University to see that this title is misleading. The school is nothing more than a small association that organizes irregular seminars at different locations around Moscow. The classes draw around 100 people and are rebroadcast on Dugin's websites, Dugintv and Evrazia-tv.[166]

Moreover, contrary to the belief of Western pundits, who view him as "Putin's guru," Dugin has little direct access to the highest echelons of the Presidential Administration. He is not part of the Kremlin's main institutions. However, he does have some go-betweens at his disposal, and one can identify several niches that connect him to certain segments of the Kremlin kaleidoscope.

With the support of Aleksandr Prokhanov, Dugin was rapidly introduced into the conservative circles of the Russian military, meeting the influential Leonid Ivashov (1943), as well as to Communist circles close to the military. He was appointed to the editorial board of *Den'* as early as December 1991. It was probably also Prokhanov who introduced him to Gennady Seleznev (1947), then the Duma's spokesman and a member of the Communist Party, whom Dugin served as adviser for geopolitical affairs. In 2000, Dugin even briefly participated in the Rossiya movement, led by Seleznev; he wrote its manifesto before leaving due to disagreements with the leadership. Dugin was also in touch with Aleksei

Podberezkin (1953), who regularly quoted him and acknowledged that Dugin inspired several of Ziuganov's books in the 1990s and early 2000s. Dugin likewise influenced Vladimir Zhirinovsky's early statements, but no interactions between the two men have been reported since the very early 1990s. Currently, Leonid Dobrokhotov (1947) acts as a link between Dugin and some senior Communist Party leaders. Dobrokhotov, listed as a professor in the MSU Department of Sociology of International Relations, has participated in numerous events organized by Dugin's Center for Conservative Research.

As a member of the Old Believers faction that has been reintegrated into the Moscow Patriarchate (*edinovercherskii*), Dugin has cultivated close relations with some political circles within the Russian Orthodox Church. He had links with some famous public figures, such as archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin (1968), who was in charge of the synod department for Church-Society interactions until 2015. In 2009 and 2012, Chaplin participated in lectures at the Center for Conservative Research.[167] Dugin also regularly cooperates with archpriest Dmitrii Smirnov (1951), who is close to both military and anti-abortion circles. However, it is his personal connection with Konstantin Malofeev (1974) that today secures him both status and revenue: since the Ukrainian crisis he has been working for the Tsargrad TV channel and the Katekhon website, both funded by Malofeev (see Chapter 9).

Dugin has been in contact with many media personalities, since the Iuzhinskii Circle hosted numerous countercultural figures – musicians, artists, and journalists. To this day, he retains the support of two major figures on Russia's media landscape.

The first is Mikhail Leontiev (1958), who since 1999 has presented *Odnako*, as well as several other programs on Russia's Channel One. Cynical and provocative, Leontiev was long regarded as one of Putin's preferred television personalities, since he represented the Kremlin's point of view. In more recent years, however, he has been sidelined in favor of people such as Dmitrii Kisiliev or Vladimir Soloviev (no relation to the famous philosopher). Leontiev consistently championed Dugin and his theories: he was a member of the Central Committee of Dugin's party Evraziia in 2001 (though he left to join United Russia soon after); introduced Dugin's theories to the Serafim Club, one of the leading discussion groups of the Putin era;[168] was a member of the short-lived Florian Geyer Club (see p. 123); and showed his support for Dugin when he was fired from MSU in 2014.[169] Leontiev became Rosneft's press officer in January 2014, formalizing his friendly relationship with Igor Sechin, the head of Rosneft.[170]

Ivan Demidov (1963) is another important figure who helps ensure Dugin's access to media circles. The two men met in the early 1990s at the weekly journal *Novyi vzgliad*, which published a broad spectrum of authors, from liberals to Prokhanov and Dugin. The two men seemed to have fallen out of touch in the 1990s, but in the 2000s, Demidov reached out to official circles and returned to nationalist themes, while reviving his contacts with Dugin. Between 2003 and 2005, for example, he led the very popular pro-government[171] religious program *Russian View* (*Russkii vzgliad*), on which Dugin was interviewed

several times.[172] Empowered by this success, Demidov founded the Orthodox channel Spas, which has since given Dugin a regular platform: he has his own geopolitical show, *Milestones* (*Vekhi*), and also appears on others, such as Dialog *Below the Clocks* (*Dialog pod chasami*).

Available public sources do not document direct contacts between Dugin and the Presidential Administration. At the end of the 2000s, Dugin liked to present himself as Putin's unacknowledged adviser,[173] regarding the Russian president as a genuinely patriotic figure, but there is no evidence of any direct influence or meeting between the two men, and Putin has never referred to him. In his book, Charles Clover states that the two men met a few months after Putin's accession to power in 2000, but there is no documented information on this meeting.[174] Dugin was also reportedly a part of the entourage that accompanied the Russian president on his visit to Mount Athos in Greece in May 2016.[175] Yet we have no detailed information on Dugin's personal connections with the Kremlin's gray cardinals, nor with the presidents or vice-presidents of the Presidential Administration – figures such as Alexander Voloshin, Vladislav Surkov, and Viacheslav Volodin. Surkov, in particular, is known for his personal hatred of Dugin's esoteric imperialism and Prokhanov's old Soviet-style patriotism. Dugin's networks seem to have been able to secure only one grant from the Presidential Administration, channeled through the Institute for Socio-Economic and Political Research (ISEPI), the Kremlin's official think tank, for a report and a website (now defunct) devoted to "the Russian World of Eurasia," i.e., Russian minorities in the "near abroad."[176]

Sergei Glaziev could have been one of Dugin's main intermediaries with the Kremlin, but the two men's relationship is said to be strained by their competition to control the term "Eurasia." Another little-known figure of note is Evgenii Fiodorov (1963), a Duma MP since 1993. He serves as president of the Duma Committee for economic policy and entrepreneurship and is a member of United Russia's Central Committee. Fiodorov created the Movement of National Liberation (*Natsional'no-osvoboditel'noe dvizhenie*), which seeks to "rediscover the sovereignty lost in 1991,"[177] under the slogan "Homeland, Freedom, Putin." Fiodorov and Dugin have worked together many times, teaming up, for instance, for a radio program to demonstrate that "Russia is already occupied" by liberal forces.[178] In 2014, Fiodorov published a text in Dugin's *Journal of Eurasian Affairs* that presented his liberation movement.[179]

Over the last 30 years, Dugin can point to two main periods of success. The first came in the second half of the 1990s, when his influence among military circles reached its peak, thanks both to his decision to move away from the countercultural National Bolshevik Party and to his connection with Alexander Prokhanov, the military, and the security services. Dugin was thus able to teach at the Academy of the General Staff, as well as work as a consultant for various Duma committees. His greatest achievement was probably becoming Seleznev's adviser in 1998; this was his only experience in actual policy circles. But his success was short lived: in the early 2000s, Dugin found himself in deep opposition to Putin, then perceived as a liberal and pro-Western statesman, and felt

himself sidelined by the groundswell of support for Putin and the president's ability to recapture patriotic feelings and the nationalist narrative.

In the 2000s, Dugin retreated into relative obscurity following the disappointing performance of his small Eurasian Party – which failed to mesh with the Rodina party – and then the very limited success of the IEM. Launched in 2003, the IEM was quite effective at bringing together pro-Eurasianist figures abroad, especially in Turkey,[180] in some post-Soviet republics such as Kazakhstan, and among Russia's Muslim leaders.[181] However, the IEM failed to unite the Russian political establishment; it appealed only to lower-level figures, mostly retired ambassadors and mid-level civil servants (Aleksandr Torshin, then deputy speaker of the Federation Council, was the sole exception to this trend). The IEM's low membership testifies to Dugin's inability to secure official support within state structures and mainstream political institutions.

Finally, in 2008, Dugin succeeded in penetrating a respectable institution, namely MSU. Yet this engagement was still conditional: he was never a tenured professor, only a docent or adjunct, while his Conservative Research Center was only associated with the Sociology Department and never a full institutional part of it.[182] Dugin recorded more success in 2013 and early 2014, when the Kremlin opened the door for all conservative ideologues to appear more visibly on state-controlled media in order to drown out the liberal opposition and saturate the ideological market. This time, his success was even more brief: his statements about the need for the "Russian Spring" to reach Moscow and his calls for national revolution in Russia itself were considered too radical, causing Dugin to lose both his access to mainstream media and his status at MSU. His call to "kill, kill, kill Ukrainians"[183] – which he later said was a metaphor – was the official reason that he lost his adjunct status at MSU.[184] Since then, Dugin has had no institutional home. He is not even a member of the Civic Chamber, Russia's consultative chamber, although one of his protégés, Valerii Korovin, was elected to it in 2014.[185] He finds himself again "wandering in the desert," in search of the promised land, with Konstantin Malofeev his main source of support.

Despite several hard times in his career, Dugin has remained faithful to his initial convictions formed in the early 1980s, when he promoted esoteric Nazism and a carnivalesque SS Black Order alongside Golovin and Dzhemal. In a 2006 interview, Dugin recalled his intellectual formation by the Iuzhinskii Circle and the particularly important role of Guénon and Evola. He concluded: "In 1981–1982, I was already a full-fledged philosopher with my own intellectual agenda, my own metaphysics and ideology. […] I did not mature any more (*bol'she ia ne zroslel*)."[186] And indeed, Dugin continues today to promote the same group of authors that he praised in the late 1980s. In 2011, for instance, he organized the first Congress of Traditionalists in Russia,[187] and he has taught Traditionalism at the New University and the Conservative Research Center. The German theoreticians of the Conservative Revolution were rehabilitated in the framework of his fourth political theory, along with Herman Wirth. Dugin put the Ahnenerbe on a pedestal in his writings from 1991 and in their updated versions republished in 2008; he praised Baron von

Ungern-Sternberg in *Giperboreia* in 1991 and delivered lectures devoted to him in 2012. He thus shows remarkable doctrinal continuity.

To this day, Dugin continues to refer to the European fascist repertoire. In 2011, along with Prokhanov and Dzhemal, he launched the short-lived Florian Geyer Club, named for the Third Reich's 8th SS Cavalry Division, which was deployed on the Eastern Front in 1943–1944.[188] In 2008, for May 9 (Victory Day), his online channel Evrazia-tv broadcast a concert by a rock group called "Ahnenerbe."[189] In 2014, during one of his last lectures at MSU, Dugin joked that the neo-Eurasianist youth movement should avoid calling itself Hitlerjugend and instead adopt a Russian name like *Oprichnina* – the secret police under Tsar Ivan the Terrible – to make itself more acceptable in the Russian context.[190] Finally, Dugin continues to cultivate the same circle of friends in Western Europe. His ties with de Benoist, strained for a time, are close again, as is his relationship with Christian Bouchet; Claudio Mutti is still one of his most faithful companions and helps to disseminate Dugin's thinking across Italy. New European contacts have been added, for example in Hungary and Greece, but those established 30 years ago are still alive.

Nevertheless, a few changes can be noted. Dugin has become more cautious in openly referring to fascism: he could not compete with the conventional meaning of the term as Russia's main historical enemy, and thus decided to promote the doctrinal body of fascism without explicitly naming it. He removed the description of Reinhard Heydrich as "a convinced Eurasianist" from the second edition of his book *Conspiracy* (*Konspirologiia*), published in 2005.[191] He claims to have made a break with the modernity inherent in fascism/nationalism in order to develop an entirely new anti-modern political theory, but he reworks the same materials and continues to cite the Conservative Revolution as an alternative to historic fascism. He has thus learned how to better weigh his words, polish his media image, and adapt to what "speaks" to the Russian audience. He has evolved on only one point: his strong anti-Soviet sentiments have disappeared. In *Giperboreia*, he celebrated the destruction of the "evil red empire," a product of a slave caste.[192] Now, his discourse frames the Soviet Union as a geopolitical and spiritual success. This change cannot be considered unique to Dugin, as many former dissidents are now nostalgic for the Soviet experience.

* * *

Dugin remains the main introducer, translator, mediator, and aggregator of fascist theories in post-Soviet Russia. In the three decades since perestroika, he has been able to translate, both literally – he reads the main European languages and speaks excellent French and good German and English – and intellectually a broad selection of far-right literature and adapt it to the Russian context. His unwavering loyalty to European doctrines makes him unique in contemporary Russia. Dugin has approached this rich intellectual domain with different lenses: first, the esoteric one (Guénon and Evola), which he mastered during his dissident years with the Iuzhinskii Circle, followed by geopolitics (European New

Right and Haushofer-style German *Geopolitik*), and finally philosophy, with Heidegger as an iconic figure. The reference to fascist theories can and should be regarded as Dugin's core ideological engine, the fundamental basis on which his other ideological arguments build. Promoting the Traditionalism of Guénon and religious prose around Orthodox themes makes sense only in the context of the metaphysical arguments that justify the choice of fascism as a genuine ideology for Russia. The framing of Eurasianism allows Dugin to instrumentalize a term that has familiarity and prestige among the Russian public and thus associate a Russophile and "clean hands" fascism with Russia's future.

Dugin should be read not only as an ideological aggregator, but also as an intellectual "huckster."[193] He adapts his doctrinal content to the evolving political currents, giving the impression that he regularly changes his mind. But this agglomeration is motivated, above all, by his unceasing need to court a new readership and to secure new funding. Dugin must generate revenue, and he has been able to create for himself some niches in the publishing market, especially university textbooks. He also belongs to the hipster culture of Moscow bohemianism: while posing with a Kalashnikov in the North Ossetian mountains a few weeks before the August 2008 Russian–Georgian War, he expressed not only an ideology of war but also an aesthetic similar to many Russian artists of the "second modern."

Among Russia's myriad ideological entrepreneurs, Dugin is the only figure to have selected fascism as his "selling product," and his success has been limited. His efforts to influence Russia's broader geopolitical narrative have prospered, but his work to introduce doctrinal contents inspired by European fascism has not. Dugin has succeeded when he has acted as a chameleon, in tune with the rest of society: in promoting Russia's great power and leading role in its Eurasian "near abroad," in celebrating the Soviet Union's messianism, in referring to Europe and to conservative values as Russia's own identity. But he has failed to anchor new ideological toolkits – be they esoteric Nazism, Guénon's and Evola's Traditionalism, or the German Conservative Revolution – in Russian public opinion or in the minds of decision-makers. When the Kremlin decided to appropriate narratives from Europe – such as the need for a unified and continental Europe that integrates Russia but excludes the United States and the struggle for conservative values – it did not borrow directly from the European New Right but from more mainstream populist parties.

Dugin has been shaped by his aspiration to become the gray cardinal of the Putin regime. So far, he has failed to secure himself an institutional home for more than a few years at a time, and he has always remained outside the Kremlin's main umbrella organizations. The role of "spin doctor" for fascism in Russia is not a secure one. Dugin will probably continue to experience the simultaneous *in* and *out* status of a lonely ideological figure, too radical, esoteric, and apocalyptic to be co-opted, but still striving for acceptance by the highest echelons of the regime. Other attempts to influence political circles with an illiberal agenda may have been more successful.

Notes

1 Dugin has generated a huge literature in many languages. Among the main landmark pieces in English, one may mention Shekhovtsov, "Palingenetic Thrust"; Anton Shekhovtsov, "Aleksandr Dugin's Neo-Eurasianism: The New Right *à la Russe*," *Religion Compass* 3, no. 4 (2009): 697–716; and Anton Shekhovtsov and Andreas Umland, "Is Dugin a Traditionalist? 'Neo-Eurasianism' and Perennial Philosophy," *Russian Review* 68 (October 2009): 662–678.

2 Some elements were brought to the discussion by Charles Clover in his book *Black Wind, White Snow* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016). However, Clover follows the conventional path, which I consider mistaken, of explaining everything that happens at the ideological level of the Putin regime as a sign of Dugin's influence.

3 Marlene Laruelle, "The Iuzhinskii Circle: Far-Right Metaphysics in the Soviet Underground and Its Legacy Today," *Russian Review* 74, no. 4 (2015): 563–580.

4 Aleksandr Dugin, *Tampliery proletariat*: *Natsional-bolshevizm i initsiatsiia* (Moscow: Arktogeia, 1997).

5 Traditionalism was formalized by René Guénon (1886–1951) and then by Julius Evola (1896–1974). It believes in the Tradition, that is, in the existence of a world that was steady in its religious, philosophical, and social principles, a world that started disappearing with the advent of modernity in the sixteenth century. Modernity is considered to be harmful in that it destroys the established hierarchical order that is natural to the world. Traditionalists thus call for a return to the world's golden era, marked by the transcendental unity of all religions, and reject the desacralization and secularization of the modern world. For them, all religions and esoteric traditions – regardless of their concrete practice – reveal the existence of a now-extinct original sacred Tradition. Dubbed the "primordial Tradition," it is seen as the secret essence of all religions. Through this appeal, Traditionalism has influenced numerous Gnostic and Masonic currents, as well as several Sufi orders. See Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*.

6 See Peter H. Merkel and Leonard Weinberg, eds., *The Revival of Right-Wing Extremism in the Nineties* (Portland: Frank Cass, 1997).

7 Dugin joined the Old Believer Church in 1999. He presents the Russian schism of the seventeenth century as the archetype of Traditionalist thought, born of rejection of the secularization of Orthodoxy, which he dates to around the same period given by Guénon for the end of Tradition in the West (after the end of the Thirty Years' War in 1648). According to Dugin, "Eurasianism will only be entirely logical if it is based on a return to the Old Belief." Aleksandr Dugin, *Russkaia veshch' ocherki Natsional'noi filosofii* (Moscow: Arktogeia, 2001), 568.

8 The bill of particulars included financial malfeasance, plagiarism, and diploma sales. See Vadim Rossman, "Moscow State University's Department of Sociology and the Climate of Opinion in Post-Soviet Russia" in *Eurasianism and the European Far Right*: *Reshaping the Europe-Russia Relationship*, ed. Marlene Laruelle (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2015).

9 "Razvitie i stanovlenie konservativnoi ideologii v Rossii s oporoi na nauchnye kadry," Center for Conservative Research, http://konservatizm.org/about.xhtml.

10 A list of the lectures and their bibliographies is available at "Kursy," Center for Conservative Research, http://books.4pt.su/issues/kursy.

11 One may find major Western authors such as Gaston Bachelard, Mircea Eliade, Jean Baudriard, Michel Foucault, Jürgen Habermas, Georges Dumezil, George Bataille, Emil Durkheim, and Claude Levi-Strauss; as well as Julius Evola, an author fetishized by Dugin; and a pantheon of classic Russian writers, such as Nikolai Berdiaev, Sergei Bulgakov, George Vernadsky, Lev Gumilev, and Konstantin Leontiev.

12 Aleksandr Dugin, *Osnovy geopolitiki: Geopoliticheskoe budushchee Rossii* (Moscow: Arktogeia, 1997). On this book, see Dunlop, "Aleksandr Dugin's 'Neo-Eurasian' Textbook."
13 For further details on Dugin's connections with military circles, see Dunlop, "Aleksandr Dugin's 'Neo-Eurasian' Textbook," 94 and 102.
14 Shekhovtsov, "Palingenetic Thrust."
15 *Istoki*, 5, 1991, quoted by Laqueur, *Black Hundred*, 115.
16 Jean Thiriart, "L'Europe jusqu'à Vladivostok," *Nationalisme & République* 9 (1992).
17 Geydar Dzhemal, "Evropa do Vladivostoka, ili Aziia do Dublina?" *Den'*, September 20–26, 1992.
18 Aleksandr Dugin, "Sumerki geroev. Pominalnoe slovo o Jean Thiriart," in *Konservativnaia revoliutsiia* (Moscow: Arktogeia, 2013).
19 On Haushofer, see David Thomas Murphy, "Hitler's Geostrategist? The Myth of Karl Haushofer and the Institut für Geopolitik," *The Historian* 76, no. 1 (2014) and David T. Murphy, "The Heroic Earth: Geopolitical Thought in Weimar Germany, 1918–1933" (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1997).
20 Ursula Laak-Michel, *Albrecht Haushofer und der Nationalsozialismus: Ein Beitrag zur Zeitgeschichte* (Stuttgart: Klett, 1974).
21 Dugin, "Ot sakral'noi geografii."
22 Dugin, *Osnovy geopolitiki*, 12.
23 See also Andreas Umland, "Patologicheskie tendentsii v russkom 'neoevraziistve': o znachenii vzleta Aleksandra Dugina dlia interpretatsii obshchestvennoi zhizni v sovremennoi Rossii," *Forum noveishei vostochnoevropeiskoi istorii i kul'tury* 6, no. 2 (2009): 127–142.
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6 Pamiat 2.0?

The Izborskii Club, or the new conservative avant-garde[1]

In August 2014, in the middle of the war in Donbas, 76-year-old Aleksandr Prokhanov was filmed aboard a T-95 bomber bearing the emblem of the Izborskii Club.[2] Russia has continued the Soviet tradition of naming airplanes after famous national figures or institutions. What is this Izborskii Club, and how did it manage to earn the honor of having one of Russia's leading military aircraft named after it? Founded at the end of 2012, the Izborskii Club spurred lively debate, with observers, both Russian and foreign, analyzing it as a symbol of the ideological hardening taking place during Putin's third presidential term.[3] Indeed, the Club argues that the two major catastrophes of twentieth-century Russia – the fall of Tsarism in 1917 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 – resulted from the Russian authorities refusing to recognize a state ideology and being unable to turn doctrinal fragments into a logical whole. The mission of the Club is thus to reopen the "cultural front" and to be "a laboratory where we will elaborate an ideology, an institute to engage in creating a forward-looking theory, a construction site to make an ideological weapon that we will send into combat without delay."[4] For the first time since the collapse of the Soviet Union, a large group of self-identified nationalists or anti-liberals has united within a single structure with the express objective of influencing ideologically the authorities. The Club can therefore be compared with Pamiat, the cadres' school of nationalism during the perestroika years – yet it probably has engineered fewer new doctrinal products than its famous predecessor.[5]

Encapsulating Russia's ideological evolution

Compared to the many other attempts over almost three decades of post-Soviet history to create nationalist "united fronts," the Club offers a distinct experience. It arose from three different contexts.

First, since the mid-2000s the Russian authorities have actively been working to slow the inflow of Western funding to Russian educational institutions and civil society organizations. With that in mind, they have progressively refined a policy of public funding to make higher education autonomous from Western financial support and to promote a "patriotically-oriented" civil society.[6] A vast realm of charity foundations emerged, sponsored by big public firms as well as

by oligarchs. This dynamic also affected the think-tank world, which has been progressively structured with a range of small discussion groups, both inside and outside the presidential party United Russia and the main government bodies. These think tanks occupy diverse ideological niches permitted by the regime and engage in intense competition for public and private funds.[7] The Izborskii Club is one of them.

The second context is Putin's third term and its attendant "conservative turn." To counter the liberal Bolotnaya protests of winter 2011–2012, the Kremlin positioned itself as a defender of so-called traditional values, which it understood to be the heterosexual family (non-recognition of homosexuality and LGBTQ rights), with its emphasis on the large family as the basis of individual life and the country's demographic health; fighting against alcoholism; respecting the elderly; and hierarchy, to name just a few.[8] This was concretized in a series of new laws, or draft laws, that have been passed or discussed since 2012: the law against so-called gay propaganda, the anti-blasphemy law in response to the Pussy Riot phenomenon, the Internet restriction bill in the name of child protection, the ban on obscene language in cinema, books, and music, and so on. It has also been accompanied by new financial benefits for families with two or more children, new draft laws that attempt to restrict abortion, and a host of public relations activities to promote healthier ways of life – all of them with a very limited impact. In this context, all references to "conservatism" were welcome and given new space to express themselves, particularly in the media. The Izborskii Club has tried to take the lead on this conservative trend.

The third context is the trajectory of Putin's "eminence grise," Vladislav Surkov, who resigned from his role as deputy prime minister in May 2013 – officially a voluntary move, but he was probably dismissed for having failed to counter the Bolotnaya movement.[9] Surkov played a key role in structuring the public landscape during Putin's second term and Dmitry Medvedev's presidency, as well as in orchestrating many patriotic projects – the Nashi movement to mobilize youth, new concepts such as "sovereign democracy," and sophisticated media tools.[10] Surkov envisions Russia embracing globalization by creating a specific Russian "brand" or "voice" that would make the country an attractive great power, with an economy on its way to modernization, strengthened by soft power tools. Surkov has been very critical of those who look back to the Soviet experience or are attracted by a Eurasian or Asian destiny for Russia, claiming instead the need for Russian national identity to look forward and to identify as a "second Europe."[11]

Surkov's worldview largely opposes that of the Izborskii Club, which constantly denounces his hidden "Westernism." Reinforcing these ideological differences are conflicts of personality and strategy. Surkov developed a "divide-and-rule" policy to ensure that all self-proclaimed nationalists would remain instrumental to the Kremlin without threatening Putin's legitimacy. In an interview, Izborskii Club co-founder Vitalii Averianov said that the Club was able to emerge as a unified platform for nationalists only after Surkov's removal.[12] The 2014 Ukrainian crisis accentuated tensions between Surkov and

the Club. The latter supported warlord Igor Strelkov and the most radical insurgents, and hoped that Russia would annex Donetsk, Luhansk, and other regions of eastern Ukraine (see Chapter 9). Surkov, meanwhile, was the main kingmaker behind the deal in late spring to remove the most radical figures of the insurgency in order to transform it into a more classic frozen secessionist conflict under Moscow's stranglehold.[13]

Born from this triple context, the Izborskii Club positions itself as the new conservative avant-garde. The notion of cultural front that it advances obviously comes from the Soviet past and the Bolshevik tradition of using culture to advance a political agenda.[14] Yet it also draws inspiration from the German *Kulturkampf* between religious and secular factions in Bismarck's Prussia. It further nurtures the fascination of many nationalist-oriented intellectuals with Gramscian theories that hold that to influence the political order and invigorate it with new ideas, the field of culture must first be won. The Club does not hide its pride in having unified different conservative movements around a single platform, a feat that supposedly ended more than two decades of ideological rifts and an institutional inability to mount an organized front. However, as I will explain later, any such success must be understood as relative.

"Nationalist" may not be the most appropriate adjective to describe the Izborskii Club. "Anti-liberal" would be a more pertinent designation, because the doctrinal core that unites the Club's many internal trends is a rejection of liberalism in all its forms – political, societal, and economic. This anti-liberal tone comes with a narrative on Russia's uniqueness, hence the overlap with nationalism. The Club claims conservatism as its central ideology, but a conservatism that should not, its members insist, be interpreted as a reactionary or backward-looking doctrine, but rather as a dynamic one seeking to build a new domestic and international political order based on "traditional" values. Yet the term is vaguely defined: which period is to be "conserved" – Stolypin's reforms, Stalin's mobilizing project, or the Brezhnev era? Another concept that regularly finds its way into the Club's narrative is "sovereignty," the backbone of the mainstream statist conception. The cover of one of the Club's books, *Putin in the Mirror of the Izborskii Club*, declared, for instance, that "for Russians, the state is a second religion."[15] As Maria Engström has shown, this fixation on stateness and sovereignty inspires the very visual notion of Russia as a fortress resistant to external influences, the *katekhon* in Byzantine theology.[16]

Politically, the Club is positioned within the "systemic opposition," encompassing all the authorized or co-opted opposition movements – those that support Putin but do not follow the official line of the government or the presidential party. The Club criticizes both the president and his party for being too centrist in terms of their values, and it would like them to enunciate an official national ideology. It also denounces the Russian government's economic policies as too liberal, calling instead for a more dirigiste policy that would reestablish the Soviet welfare state and resurrect the state planning apparatus.[17] With certain nuances, the Club occupies the same ideological space as Gennadii Ziuganov's Communist Party did at its peak, with an analogous combination of references to

Holy Russia and such socialist/Soviet economic features as the nationalization of major economic enterprises, the abolition of private property, and the reinstatement of autarkic trade policy.[18]

One of the most striking features of the Club's ideology is its emphasis on a new great mobilization project for Russia, and the name given to it – the great leap forward (*bol'shoi ryvok*), an unabashed reference to the policies of forced collectivization and rapid industrialization pursued by Communist China between 1958 and 1960.[19] The Club also refers to the major public works policies of the Soviet era and the atmosphere of permanent ideological mobilization that suffused the Stalin era, desperately trying to make the project Orthodox by putting it in parallel, for instance, with Christ's resurrection on Easter.[20] Several of the Club's authors, such as Maksim Kalashnikov, refer to the creation of a new *oprichnina* to manage this mobilization project. A "lightning development army" (*armiia molnienosnogo razvitiia*) of 50,000 young men and women, unrestrained by either administrative agencies or the law, would be in charge of a "moral revolution," a phrasing that leaves little doubt about the repressive nature of the project.[21]

The Club's ideological genesis

The Club was born from the blending of two doctrinal traditions. The first, which Prokhanov embodies, can be called "Soviet imperialist" – a broad term that also includes, but is not limited to, the Eurasianists. Since the final years of perestroika, Prokhanov, known in the 1980s by the nickname "song bird" of the Soviet General Staff, and chief editor of the Soviet-oriented weekly newspaper *Zavtra*, has repeatedly tried to engineer broad coalitions against Western-oriented reforms, for example the National Salvation Front and the People's Patriotic Union, which backed Ziuganov's 1996 presidential bid.[22] After several years devoted mostly to writing, Prokhanov returned to political activism in the latter half of the 2000s, always seeking consensus among the different anti-liberal factions. He gives the Club's journal, *Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii*, its main tone and pathos, and many of its articles are also devoted to him, at times revealing features akin to a cult of personality.

The second tradition can be defined as political Orthodoxy. While many institutions and figures embody this trend, the Izborskii Club was born from a specific initiative, the Center for Dynamic Conservatism. The Center was led by Vitalii Averianov (1973), one of the best-known Orthodox publicists, chief editor of Pravoslavie.ru, the most-read Orthodox website, a member of the Writers' Union and of several secular councils of the Russian Orthodox Church, and by Andrei Kobiakov (1961), an economist by training and deputy editor of the journal *Odnako*, who is associated with the television program of the same name hosted by Mikhail Leontev on Channel One.

Created in 2005, the Center for Dynamic Conservatism became famous for its publication of a collective text, *Serge's Project* – a reference to one of Russia's most popular saints, St. Sergius of Radonezh.[23] This programmatic text, also

known as the Russian Doctrine (*Russkaia doktrina*), presented itself as the successor to the famous *Vekhi* (*Signposts*) of 1909, a manifesto against the ideology of the radical intelligentsia of the early twentieth century, but it equally merits comparison with the New American Century project.[24] The reference to Sergius of Radonezh confirms the distinctly Orthodox tone of the document, which was presented as a first attempt to theorize Russia's new conservatism.

Conceiving of Russia as a specific civilization, whose values are in direct opposition to those of the West, the Center for Dynamic Conservatism called on the country to fight for its spiritual sovereignty and to recover its strictly Russian (*russkii*) – and not Rossian (*rossiiskii*) – historical traditions: autocracy, empire, and unity. The Center does not regard its insistence on Orthodox traditions as incompatible with the Soviet heritage since, as it claims, "we consider the borders of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union as holy."[25] The Center was financed by a foundation, The Russian Entrepreneur, which sought to promote what it called "popular diplomacy."[26] To this end, it financed a newspaper of the same name, *Russkii predprinimatel'*, and the information agency RPMonitor, which has a special "Russian World" page dedicated to the media's treatment of issues linked with Russia's identity, as well as an Internet portal for geopolitics designed to popularize the main arguments of Russian foreign policy in such a way as to "counter the ideological diversions of forces opposed to Russia from developing among youth."[27]

The Russian Doctrine received significant support from the Moscow Patriarchate, in particular from the Danilov Monastery, known for its conservative positions. Then-Metropolitan Kirill (who became Patriarch in 2008) presented the programmatic text at the World Russian National Council; it was also backed by institutions known for their nationalist views, such as the Russian Union of Writers. In 2009, the Foundation set up a project called Decalogue-21 to promote the Ten Commandments among youth as moral ideals impeccably suited to contemporary life and to all Russian citizens, no matter their religious beliefs or affiliations.[28] This initiative is a direct continuation of the logic of the Russian Doctrine: imbue state organs with religious precepts so as to foster order, morality, and patriotism. Though the biblical references may seem extreme, the foundation has nevertheless organized a conference devoted to the Decalogue in partnership with the Patriotic-State Club (one of United Russia's discussion clubs) in which several high-ranking civil servants have participated, including members of the Duma's Committee for Youth Affairs.[29]

The Club's political networks

The Center for Dynamic Conservatism merged with Prokhanov's networks to give birth to the new Izborskii Club in 2012. Based on these two different doctrinal traditions, the "Soviet empire" and political Orthodoxy, the Club offers diverging nuances and tones. It brings together an interesting combination of personalities, individual and collective trajectories, and ideological stances, which can be envisioned as several concentric circles.

Founding fathers Aleksandr Prokhanov, Vitalii Averianov, and Andrei Kobiakov lead the Club and shape its overarching doctrinal direction. A second group includes major names on the Russian ideological scene: Natalia Narochnitskaia (1948), director of the Paris-based Institute of Democracy and Cooperation and noted promoter of political Orthodoxy; Father Tikhon (Shevkunov) (1958), a prominent cleric, best-selling writer, and editor of Pravoslavie.ru, who is rumored to be Putin's personal confessor; and Leonid Ivashov, a retired general, influential mediator between nationalist circles and the military, and long-time Dugin supporter. Three other Club members are leading opinion journalists and media entrepreneurs: Mikhail Leontev has his famous weekly magazine on Channel One, *Odnako*; Maksim Shevchenko (1966), in charge of several broadcasts on Channel One, is known for specializing in ethnocultural and religious issues, especially in the North Caucasus; and Nikolai Starikov (1970), commercial director of Channel One in St. Petersburg, is co-chair of the Great Fatherland party and a prolific publicist.[30] Two famous economists, Sergei Glaziev and Mikhail Delyagin (1968), director of the Institute for the Study of Globalization, bring their economic expertise to the Club, as do a series of lesser-known economic experts, all of whom have relatively similar statist stances that favor economic dirigisme.

Surrounding the Club's main figures is a third, larger group of core members with different backgrounds. Some are old friends of Prokhanov and regular contributors to *Zavtra*, like journalists Vladislav Shurygin and Aleksandr Nagornyi. For them, the Club offers a new platform for publishing, and they view it as a doctrinal extension of *Zavtra*; often their papers appear first in *Zavtra*, and then are republished in the Club's journal. Others are famous publicists, such as the pro-Stalinist writer and novelist Maksim Kalashnikov (a pen name); Andrei Fursov, a member of the Writers' Union; and Aleksandr Dugin. The latter joined the Club with his own Eurasianist group: Valerii Korovin, who, when elected to the Public Chamber in spring 2014, became the first representative of the Eurasianist movement in a state institution; Leonid Savin, editor-in-chief of the *Geopolitika* website and journal; and Shamil Sultanov, president of a small think tank called the Russia-Islamic World Strategic Center.[31]

A fourth circle is comprised of less prominent figures who are regular contributors to the Club's journal, many of whom direct their own small institutions (see p. 140). A fifth circle of occasional contributors includes specialists from a range of backgrounds who have been invited to one of the Club's seminars or have written a commissioned paper on a specific topic: writers and publicists linked to major conservative literary institutions such as the Writers' Union; academics, often in the hard sciences, from the Academy of Sciences; professors from provincial universities; figures from the art world, mostly film directors; and Orthodox clerics. Last but not least, a sixth circle is made up of senior official representatives (regional governors, federal district representatives, and presidents of autonomous republics, for instance Yakutia-Sakha and Dagestan), high-ranking military personnel from the Headquarters of the Armed Forces or other military bodies, and CEOs from the military-industrial complex.

The Club appears to function on a fairly generous budget. The print publications are of very good quality, and the Club launched a book series that published over 40 *publitsistika*-type books between 2015 and early 2018. Workshops and seminars are numerous: several per month, all listed in each monthly issue of the Club's journal. Its members travel regularly across Russia's regions and sometimes abroad to places judged symbolic for the Club's ideology: in 2013–2014, they went to Gaza, Syria, and Transnistria, and in 2015 Prokhanov met for several hours with former Iranian president Mahmud Ahmadinejad.[32]

Prokhanov's long-held connections with the military-industrial complex, and the space devoted in the *Izborskii klub* journal to such figures as Yuri Lastochkin, CEO of Rybinskie Motors and Saturn, Russia's largest aeronautical-engine manufacturer, provide some insight into the possible origins of the funding: the military-industrial complex seems to be the main source of revenues for the Club. Many of its members also have their own small institutions, often very obscure, but which probably generate their own funding. For example, Alexandr Ageev leads the Russian Academy of Forecasting; Sergei Bachikov heads up the International Academy of Corporate Management; Vasilii Simchera is president of the Senator bank; Aleksandr Notin has his own investment fund, Monolit; Mikhail Kazin runs his own consulting firm, Neokon; and Oleg Rozanov is CEO of a network of pharmacies called Metr. This gives us a small window into the largely understudied world of consultancies in Russia.

In terms of political lobbying, the Club is able to draw on some established networks. Prokhanov has maintained connections within the military and security forces that date back to the Soviet era. These are still functional, as he demonstrated when he was able to get a Tu-95 bomber based at Engles Air Base near Saratov named after the Izborskii Club and painted with its logo.[33] He also cultivates links with the military-industrial complex, which allowed the Club to have several of its meetings at the Aviastar factory in Ulyanovsk, where Tupolevs and Iluyshins are made; at the Khimki-based Energomash factory, which builds rockets; at Uralvagonzavod, the largest battle tank manufacturer in the world; and at the aircraft engine manufacturer Saturn. Prokhanov also has access to another network, the Rodina party led by Dmitri Rogozin (1963), deputy prime minister in charge of the military-industrial complex. Prokhanov announced a decade ago that he would align with Rogozin's Rodina party rather than Ziuganov's Communist Party, and this alliance continues to this day.[34] Prokhanov presents himself as one of the main ideologues for Rogozin's political stance and feeds the Rodina website with many of his analyses.[35]

The Club also draws some of its legitimacy from its contacts with various high-ranking senior officials. Its highest-placed figure, Sergei Glaziev, is in charge of supervising the Eurasian Union project. Minister of Culture Vladimir Medinskii attended the opening ceremony of the Club in September 2012, but while he shares most of its ideological stances, he does not actively participate in its events.[36] Whenever the Club holds meetings in Russia's regions, Prokhanov is able to bring together the governors and vice-governors, a sign

of his deep-rooted connections with regional elites, but also of his ability to promote himself as having Moscow's ear.

The need for a unifying metanarrative … and its partial failure

Launched in 2012 in the small town of Izborsk, near Pskov, the Club's political identity is reflected in its name. The city was commemorating its 1,150-year anniversary – a date based on the legendary arrival of Riurik and his brothers in the region – allowing the Club to link itself to Russia's long history of statehood (*gosudarstvennost'*). The city is also situated on the western border of the Russian world, meaning it has resisted an array of invasions – Poland-Lithuania in the sixteenth century, Sweden in the seventeenth century, and Germany during World War II. These two facts encapsulate the Club's ideological stance: Russia's historical continuity and its fundamental mission as a fortress against Western influences are two sides of the same coin. When political changes cause Russia to lose its sense of temporal unity, it becomes vulnerable to external attacks. As Vitalii Averianov put it, "Russia is one and indivisible not only in space but also in time."[37] Specifically, the Club proclaims that Russia's major challenge is to:

> reject the liberal discourses that have dominated since 1991 and according to which Russian history is at a complete impasse, the Russian people and the peoples of our empire are allies of defeat in defeat, our history is only a succession of executioner's blocks and gallows, and our tsars, princes, and leaders are either sadists or degenerates.[38]

The long-awaited Red-and-White reconciliation?

Although the Club seems to offer a consensus on anti-liberal principles, its members disagree on many doctrinal issues. Prokhanov's judicious strategy is not to try to solve these differences, but to integrate them into a consensual metanarrative that allows for a plurality of opinion. Sergei Cherniakhovskii, one of the Club's writers, insists that the goal "is not a synthesis, but an alliance" between different anti-liberal tendencies.[39] Prokhanov himself has tried to broker a reconciliation (*primirenie*) between Reds and Whites: "It is necessary to create a state in which, as Putin has said, one can live as a Red commissar or as a White officer."[40] His strategy is not new. Almost immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Prokhanov began to use his weekly *Den'* – the predecessor to *Zavtra* – as a platform for dialog among all those opposed to change. Though he was then in charge of *Sovetskaia Rossiia*, a bastion of Soviet ideology, he invited Metropolitan Ioann Snychev (1927–1995), known for his ultraconservative, monarchist, and anti-Semitic views, to bless the new publication's editorial board, early evidence of his search for a Red–White reconciliation.[41]

In *Izborskii klub*'s first issues, Prokhanov solemnly appealed to all supporters of a strong state (*gosudarstvenniki*): "This [Red–White] fusion means integrating

into the state structure and its actions a powerful element of social justice, which is inherited from the Soviet Union, and a return to Orthodox Christian spirituality and the universality of traditional Russia."[42] Symbolizing this rapprochement, the third edition of the journal offered a photomontage with Stalin and Nicholas II posing together. During a trip to Yekaterinburg, during which the Club followed a procession honoring Nicholas II and his family (who were executed there) and visited the nearby Snezhinsk secret nuclear site, Prokhanov advanced the idea of a monument to Red–White reconciliation. It would feature a woman symbolizing the motherland and two soldiers at her feet, one Soviet, one Tsarist. The photos on the pages of *Izborskii klub* attempt to illustrate this Red–White reconciliation: Russian churches, monasteries, and landscapes traditional for expressing the "Russian soul" – valleys, rivers, and birch forests – alongside Soviet military and industrial symbols, and myriad paintings by Aleksei Beliaev-Gintovt that perfectly embody the Club's call for ideological consensus.

In the Club's view, the Red–White reconciliation should occur in the name of the country's sovereignty. Russia should follow "the tradition of the Russian tsars, of the builders of empire, or the tradition of Stalin, of the construction of Soviet civilization, [because] in both cases what is most sacred is the sovereignty of state power."[43] And in order to heal the rift that sundered Red from White in the aftermath of 1917, Prokhanov proposed a smart and ambitious historical "pirouette," "What destroyed tsarism was not Bolshevism, but the liberalism of the February Revolution" – a cunning attempt to blame the West for the end of the Tsarist system while framing the Soviet Union as the historical extension of imperial Russia.[44]

Today, the Club presents reconciliation as an absolute necessity for Russia, for two reasons. First, whereas in the 1990s the country was too ideologically divided for reconciliation to occur, the Putin decades have erased the memory of this bitter division. Second, the country is now on the cusp of a new historical catastrophe and new divisions, with the anti-Putin protests of 2011–2012 merely the tip of the iceberg. Thus, the time has come for Reds and Whites to move beyond their divisions and unify. It is this second element that is most prominent in the Club's writings, which constantly compare today's Russia with the Time of Troubles.[45] The Club even refers to the American Civil War and Reconstruction, noting that the North–South reconciliation in the United States did not have to be complete in order to be successful; two competing discourses have continued to coexist, unified by a metanarrative on shared American values.[46]

Still, the Club has not fully succeeded in carrying out its reconciliatory goal. Its journal gives a platform to religious figures, including Father Tikhon; and some Club members, such as Dugin and to a lesser extent Prokhanov himself, have been closely connected to Konstantin Malofeev. Orthodox values and the sanctity of Russia are major themes in the Club's overarching narrative. According to Prokhanov, "the Russian state's ideology is founded on service, sacrificial exploit, and faith in divine trade … because Russia is a holy-bearer corridor (*sviatonosnyi koridor*)."[47] Orthodoxy is also a tool in the Club's declarations of anti-Western and anti-liberal faith: "The West is the contemporary space of the

anti-Christ," it argues, and it is marked by its decadent mores and consumerism, against a Russia that positions itself as a standard-bearer of conservative Christian values.[48] Thus, Orthodoxy is integrated into the Club's predominant discourse, as it validates Russia's statehood and universal mission. Yet the imperial past is acknowledged only in order to promote the continuity of the Russian state – the Romanovs per se have not been rehabilitated. A purely pro-Tsarist narrative remains largely absent from the Club, and its main monarchist wings do not feature in the pages of the journal.

At the doctrinal level, the Club has failed to generate the deep, devoutly desired reconciliation between Reds and Whites: the monarchist movements remain outside its reach. Although the Club is the product of a marriage of convenience between the notion of "Soviet empire," as celebrated by Prokhanov, and the more classic political Orthodoxy of the Russian Doctrine, the alliance remains uneven. Prokhanov's style largely dominates, a trend that accelerated in 2014 with the Ukrainian crisis. The White message has gradually been replaced with a more modest cult of Orthodoxy as the symbol of a timeless Russian identity, whose sanctity embodies mostly … the Soviet regime. This sanctification of the Soviet Union was vividly illustrated in May 2015, when the Club commissioned a new icon, "The Great-Power Virgin Mary" (*Bogomater' derzhavnaia*), showing Stalin as a holy figure. The icon was blessed in a small parish and exhibited on a tank for a local May 9 military parade.[49] With this provocative gesture – which the Patriarchate intensely criticized – Prokhanov was hoping to promote a literal reading of "religion of victory" (*religiia pobedy*), a phrase he coined to describe the meaning of the 1945 victory for Russia. Similarly, an article by him on "Mystical Stalinism" offers a solemn hymn to the Soviet leader who transformed a defeat into a victory and who, like a phoenix, would be reborn in popular memories as someone akin to a *bogatyr'*, a traditional knight in Russian tales.[50] Another issue of *Izborskii klub*, devoted to the topic of social justice, displays a lithograph showing Jesus with a Soviet flag.[51]

The active presence of the founders of the Russian Doctrine within the Club's structures and publications is thus insufficient to rally all those who refer to political Orthodoxy. Clerical institutions are active only at the margins of the Club. The high priestess of political Orthodoxy, Natalia Narochnitskaia, although a member, has barely published in its journal, instead cultivating other outlets for her views.[52] Father Tikhon does not make up for the visible absence of the principal ideologues of the Patriarchate, such as Vsevolod Chaplin, even if a 2015 issue of *Izborskii klub* carried a long discussion with Metropolitan Ilarion and announced that Episcop Avgustin (Anisimov) had joined the Club. The latter did not co-opt, for instance, Nikita Mikhalkov, nor other figures advancing a monarchist agenda. Vitalii Averianov recognizes that hardline monarchist movements, particularly the Russian Aristocratic Council, oppose Putin and demand that Lenin's mausoleum be removed and the anti-religious character of the Soviet regime denounced, demands that the Kremlin is not prepared to fulfill.[53] The Club's legitimacy has been dented by its inability to find a place for

the White narrative, even if the latter has been gaining in visibility in Russia's public space in recent years.[54]

The dilemma of imperialism and ethnonationalism

The second doctrinal tension dividing the Club is the attitude toward empire. The concept of empire is ambiguous because it defines not only the nature of the Tsarist regime but also a broader geopolitical project that can take different forms. On several occasions, the Club's authors have mentioned the intrinsically imperial nature of Russia. One of the Club's mottos is that Russian history can be divided into five periods, each represented by an empire: Kiev and Novgorod were the first Russian Empire, expanding to the north, south, and east; Moscow was the second, once it threw off the Mongol yoke; the Romanov empire was the third; the Soviet Union was the fourth; and the ongoing Eurasian Union project is the fifth.[55] Therefore, the Club does not confer supremacy of any sort onto the Tsarist regime as the bearer of Russia's imperial identity, preferring instead to emphasize an imperial model detached from the nature of the regime. This ambiguity is reflected in the fluid character of the terminology used. The Russian state can be described as Russian (*russkii*), Rossian (*rossiiskii*), or Eurasian (*evraziiskii*), without particular distinction: Rus', Russia, and Eurasia are essentially synonymous.

A pro-Soviet minded figure, Prokhanov celebrates national diversity on the Soviet model of friendship among peoples: Soviet or Eurasian supra-identity articulates harmoniously with localized ethnic identities. As he states, "By empire I mean not the domination of one aggressive nation against the others, but a symphony of spaces, cultures, languages, peoples, potentialities."[56] This presupposition is developed by *Izborskii klub* when it reports on the many meetings with representatives of national republics, for instance president of Sakha-Yakutia Egor Borisov or then-head of Dagestan Ramazan Abdulatipov, who both embody this Soviet frame of friendship among peoples.[57] The pages of the Club's journal openly prioritize supporters of the Eurasian project, which takes two main forms: the metaphysical Eurasianism developed by Dugin and the official Kremlin-backed Customs Union/Eurasian Economic Union personified by Glaziev.[58] Both are equally represented in *Izborskii klub*, a subtle balance to maintain given the two men's mutual antipathy.

However, the Club's members are far from unanimous when it comes to defining Russia as an empire, because of the issue of multi-ethnicity and ethnic miscegenation, a classic fear of nationalists everywhere. Although non-imperialists constitute a minority of the Club's membership, their opinions are given some space and debated in the journal. Konstantin Zatulin (1958), the director of the Institute of CIS Countries, an old friend of former Moscow mayor Iurii Luzhkov (1936), and an avid partisan of Russian support for "compatriots" abroad, for instance openly criticizes the Eurasianist perspective and its imperial undertones. He denounces the Club's call for developing privileged relations with the Islamic world and he did not support Prokhanov's trip to Gaza.

Zatulin summed up the imperial debate in Russia as follows: "Yes, I am in favor of empire. […] And maybe it will be called 'Eurasian' at this new stage of history. But I want to be clear: it is a geographical notion above all."[59] By insisting on Eurasia as a purely geographical notion, Zatulin indirectly states that Russia's Eurasian destiny cannot be one that involves cultural or ethnic mixing with "Asia." Many contributors to *Izborskii klub* have been more explicit than Zatulin in their view that Russian ethnic identity must be preserved. Kalashnikov devoted an article to "White Europeans and Their Demographic 'Suicide'" as a dangerous path down which Russia is treading. Iurii Poliakov, editor-in-chief of *Literaturnaia gazeta*, spoke of Russia's depopulation as genocide.[60]

The Club does not limit itself to historical and cultural debates, but tries to advance concrete migration policies. It demands, for instance, that official status be given to the Russianness of the Russian Federation in order to protect ethnic Russians from what it describes as discrimination, and to consolidate Russian culture and language. In exchange for this Russification of Russia, the country could afford a liberal migration policy that would give Russian passports to all those who have lived legally there for the past five years and who can meet certain salary and Russian-language proficiency requirements. However, the Club would prefer to see a state policy of fighting male mortality, reducing the number of civil servants, and bringing more retirees back to work. Such policies, it argues, would add about five million people to Russia's workforce, and they would "render unnecessary the massive arrival of *gastarbeiter*, help stop the destruction of Russia's ethnocultural equilibrium, and break free from migrants who cannot or will not integrate."[61]

The Club's debate over imperialism versus ethnonationalism betrays the organization's ambiguous positioning. Two contributors to *Izborskii klub*, Dugin and Kalashnikov, have long been known for their efforts to introduce neo-fascist language, and even Nazi symbolism, to the Russian nationalist landscape. In one article, Kalashnikov drew an explicit parallel to Nazism when explaining the need for a Russian Ahnenerbe – an institution that would produce a new ideology based on the cult of ancestors and integrate ancient esoteric know-how into modern science.[62] All this could be accomplished, moreover, while "avoiding Germany's errors, which led to its defeat" – a phrasing that avoids explicitly mentioning the Nazi regime and its genocidal policy.[63] The Club's doctrinal borrowings seem to be largely from the harshest periods of Communist regimes – the Stalin and Mao eras – with some typically Russian tones, such as the *oprichnina* reference, but the discreet mention of Nazism is neither innocent nor accidental.

Prokhanov's response to Zatulin and those who support him is short on analysis, especially as he refuses to grapple with the dilemma of Russia being both imperial and xenophobic. He reminded his readers that arguments about the "unprofitability" of empire for Russia have been going on since the late Brezhnev years. As a result, Russians stopped believing in the empire and it collapsed – proof, according to Prokhanov, that empire is the only option if the country's destruction is to be avoided.[64] This inability to address the ethnonationalism

issue is perceptible also in the refusal of the Club to engage in any critical dialog with the National Democrats (see Chapter 8). The latter are mentioned only in passing, as enemies of Russia, because they display pro-Western orientations, call for the secession of the North Caucasus, and support a closed Russia that refuses any imperial mission, all to preserve the country's ethnic homogeneity.[65] The Club is thus missing out on an opportunity to engage in a frank discussion of the nature of Russia as an empire or a nation-state, and to act as a genuine platform for all nationalist tendencies.

Prokhanov's touch: reintegrating the economy into the debate on the nation

In an attempt to resolve these two fundamental dichotomies – the Red-versus-White reading of Russia's history and the empire-versus-xenophobia dilemma – Prokhanov updated what had been his ideological calling card since the 1970s: he reinserted the economy into the debate over national identity in the hope of moving away from contentious friction over the past. In 1979, he became known for a potent and noteworthy article, "Metaphor of the Present," in which he denounced the hidden elitism of "village prose." He interpreted village prose as cultivating a vision of a long-gone world; only by turning toward modernity could the greatness of Soviet power be maintained. He thus encouraged nationalists to search for an ideological alternative to *passéism*, promoting instead the "urbanization" of national feeling, in which self-expression would find an outlet in technological progress.[66] Prokhanov's understanding of the Club's present mission follows the same vein: rehabilitate the economy, industry in particular, in a discourse otherwise mired in intellectual and spiritual limbo.

More than 30 years after publishing his first major work, Prokhanov has returned to the task of celebrating industrialization as Russia's source of autonomy from the rest of the world and driver of its great power, both in strategic terms and in symbolic recognition. "The post-industrialization narrative," he solemnly declared, "is a form of neo-colonialism," reiterating a widespread narrative about the danger Russia would face if it became simply a raw-material exporter, unable to produce sophisticated manufactured goods.[67] The de-industrialization of Russia must thus be fought against because it is intrinsically linked to the risk of losing state sovereignty. Prokhanov often evokes his fetish theme of the "Russian weapon" (*russkoe oruzhie*), a term that sounds paradoxical in Russian because it does not refer to a weapon made in Russia, but to one that embodies Russian cultural characteristics. Prokhanov explicitly proclaims that this Russian weapon would "defend not only people and territory, but also Russia's religious and cultural contributions."[68] In a grandiloquent tone, he contends that the missiles and warships produced in Russia have the spirit of Alexander Nevsky, who was victorious over German and Swedish armies, and Dmitri Donskoi, who triumphed over the Golden Horde.[69]

This industrialist discourse does not lack more pragmatic motives. As we saw previously, the Club cultivates relations with the military-industrial

complex, in particular with its more advanced and prestigious sectors: nuclear, space, and aviation. It also gives the floor to those who embody the success of Russian/Soviet science: Zhores Alferov (1930), for example, Nobel laureate in physics and co-creator of modern hetero-structure physics and electronics, often speaks in the pages of the journal. Economic issues occupy a significant place in the Club's narrative. Various dossiers supervised by economists, often by Glaziev himself, focus on the Eurasian integration processes, customs regulation, the state of Russian exports, agricultural sector reforms, food security, and the development of the services sector. The Club calls for renationalizing Russia's main industrial sectors and having strong financial incentives to sponsor it through state orders. It celebrates the collective ownership of land, Stolypin-style reforms, and a protectionist system that hampers imports and investments overseas. It also emphasizes the need for Russia to become competitive in terms of information and network warfare, and thus calls for massive investment in advanced technologies, but without explaining how Russia could become self-sufficient or how a state-centered economy could develop the IT sector.[70]

The Club often refers to the traditional leftism of Russian society. It relies on several Levada Center sociological surveys that confirm that the majority of the population wants more state involvement in the economy and sees the state as the main provider of social justice and redistribution.[71] However, surveys also show that Russian public opinion favors preserving spaces of freedom and the market economy, and would therefore oppose a new Soviet-style dirigisme. For the Club, nonetheless, the next stage in the Putin-backed reassertion of Russia is to turn back economic liberalism and to get rid of the liberals who still dominate decision-making in the economic and financial spheres.[72] The Ukrainian crisis reinvigorated this discourse, which took the form of a violent anti-oligarch narrative (see Chapter 9).

* * *

The Club provides a rich tapestry for scholarly debates on the place of ideology in Putin's Russia. Its ideological kernel has paired several significant canons of "Russian nationalism" with debates currently animating Russian public opinion – conspirological readings of geopolitics, information war, Russia's economic choices in a globalized system, and so on. However, the Club does not offer any substantive strategic revision of Russia's role in global affairs and identity, and is unable to present a forward-looking picture. It nurtures discursive reservoirs of symbols that are still very much Soviet-oriented, and identity repertoires that are less original or innovative than those elaborated around Surkov or the National Democrats. However, the Club represents one of the rare cases of attempting to institutionalize a doctrine, in the sense that there is an identifiable platform that can be located in its political networks, and to some extent its financial ones, and this location is closely articulated with ideological content. On that, the Club is the genuine heir of Pamiat.

The Club draws on some significant political support – from both Dmitri Rogozin and Sergei Glaziev, allies within the military and military-industrial complex, as well as in the media realm via Mikhail Leontev's broad network. However, pretending that the Club is a product of the Kremlin is too simplistic. It appears to be in open conflict with Vladislav Surkov, and went too far in supporting the most radical insurgents in Donetsk and Luhansk during spring 2014. By presenting Novorossiya as the beginning of the national liberation of Russians and calling for the revolution to reach Russia itself, the Club was seen as dangerous for the status quo, and it was progressively invited to moderate its revolutionary tone and rejoin the Kremlin-backed mainstream (see Chapter 9). The Club thus confirms the existence of autonomous spaces authorized by the regime – sometimes supported, sometimes marginalized – and the blurring of red lines, which can be crossed unintentionally or retroactively modified. Vitalii Averianov's statement that "we have already almost created a sort of ideological reserve of the Kremlin, and now the real question is that of activating this ideology" is above all aspirational.[73] The hope for "activating" this ideological reserve reflects the pious wishes of the Club's members, but does not seem to fit into the Presidential Administration's strategies.

Notes

1 Previously published in 2016 as "The Izborsky Club, or the New Conservative Avant-Garde in Russia," *The Russian Review* 75, no. 4: 626–644.
2 See "Nebesnyi Izborsk," *Izborskii Club* (blog), August 16, 2014, http://izborsk-club.livejournal.com/71006.html.
3 Sergei Gogin, "Izborskii Klub: Back in the USSR?" *Ezhednevnyi zhurnal*, January 9, 2013, www.ej.ru/?a=note&id=12560#.
4 *Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii* 10 (2013): 32 and *Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii* 2 (2013): 4.
5 My analysis is based on reading the Club's journal, *Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii*, which has been published nearly monthly since 2013 (27 issues, ranging from 120 to 160 pages, from January 2013 to August 2015). The journal belongs to the Russian tradition of "thick journals" (*tolstye zhurnaly*) and contains political articles, literary excerpts, sometimes even poetry, as well as a rich and sophisticated visual element, reproducing the works of many contemporary artists. I do not cover the books published in the Club's series: many of them either reproduce, with slight alterations, the journal's articles, or are compilations of papers, op-eds, and speeches of the Club's main members, covering topics such as conspiracy theories, the information war against Russia, Western Russophobia, the Russian elite's betrayal, and calls for Russia's revival and reassertion.
6 Sarah L. Henderson, "Civil Society in Russia: State-Society Relations in the Post-Yeltsin Era," *Problems of Post-Communism* 58, no. 3 (2011): 11–27.
7 Richard Sakwa, *Putin Redux: Power and Contradiction in Contemporary Russia* (London: Routledge, 2014). On the birth of the think tank field, see Marlene Laruelle, "Inside and Around the Kremlin's Black Box: The New Nationalist Think Tanks in Russia," *Stockholm Papers*, October 2009.
8 Gulnaz Sharafutdinova, "The Pussy Riot Affair and Putin's Démarche From Sovereign Democracy to Sovereign Morality," *Nationalities Papers* 42, no. 4 (2014): 615–621.
9 On Bolotnaya, see Graeme Robertson, "Protesting Putinism: The Election Protests of 2011–2012 in Broader Perspective," *Problems of Post-Communism* 60, no. 2 (2013):

11–23. On Surkov, see Lilia Biriukova, Maksim Glinkin, and Maksim Tovkailo, "Surkova mogli uvolit' za simpatiiu k Bolotnoi," *Vedomosti*, May 13, 2013, www.vedomosti.ru/politics/news/11931721/surkov_poteryal_soveschatelnyj_golos, which lists the main possible reasons for his resignation.

10 See Karen Dawisha, "Vladislav Surkov, 1964–," in *Russia's People of Empire: Life Stories from Eurasia, 1500 to the Present*, eds. Stephen Norris and Willard Sunderland (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012), 339–349.
11 See Vladislav Surkov, *Texts* (Moscow: Europe, 2010). See also Richard Sakwa, "Surkov: Dark Prince of the Kremlin," Open Democracy, April 7, 2011, www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/richard-sakwa/surkov-dark-prince-of-kremlin.
12 *Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii* 6 (2014): 86.
13 Catherine A. Fitzpatrick, "Kremlin 'Grey Cardinal' Surkov's Deal for a 'Donetsk Transdniestria'?" *The Interpreter*, July 9, 2014, www.interpretermag.com/kremlin-grey-cardinal-surkovs-deal-for-a-donetsk-transdniestria/.
14 See, for instance, Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992).
15 Aleksandr Prokhanov *et al.*, *Putin v zerkale Izborskogo kluba* (Moscow: Knizhnyi mir, 2014).
16 Maria Engström, "Contemporary Russian Messianism and New Russian Foreign Policy," *Contemporary Security Policy* 35, no. 3 (2014): 356–379.
17 *Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii* 3 (2014): 74, 95.
18 March, *The Communist Party*.
19 *Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii* 1 (2013): 41.
20 *Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii* 2 (2013): 7.
21 *Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii* 1 (2013): 84 and *Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii* 5 (2013): 28.
22 Wayne Allensworth, *The Russian Question: Nationalism, Modernization, and Post-Communist Russia* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998).
23 Sergius of Radonezh, canonized in 1452, is famous for having blessed Dmitri Donskoi before his battle against the Mongols in 1380, which marked the beginning of the liberation of Muscovy from the "Tatar yolk." See the website Russkaia Doktrina, www.rusdoctrina.ru.
24 Published in 1909 with articles by Nikolai Berdiaev, Sergei Bulgakov, Peter Struve, and Semion Frank, *Vekhi* called on the revolutionary intelligentsia to promote the primacy of the spiritual over the material, to strive toward a merging of knowledge and faith, and to restore the role of religious philosophy in the intellectual and spiritual development of Russia.
25 Russkaia doktrina, www.rusdoctrina.ru/index.php?subject=5 (document no longer available).
26 The Foundation has no other website than its journal, *Russkii predprinimatel'*, which is available at www.ruspred.ru.
27 Vitaliy Averianov, "Stolknovenie missii," *Russkii predprinimatel'* 1–2 (2005), www.ruspred.ru/arh/24/spro.php. Some of this information was located at www.rpmonitor.ru and www.rpmonitor.ru/ru/rum/, but this website is no longer operational.
28 *Initsiativa Dekalog-XXI i problem nravstvennogo vozrozhdeniia rossiiskogo obshchestva* (Moscow, 2008), 27–29.
29 "Sovmestnoe zadesanie Gosudarstvenno-patrioticheskogo kluba partii Edinaia Rossiia i RP-kluba," *Initsiativa Dekalog-XXI*.
30 Ibid.
31 A biography of each Club member is available in the special issue of the journal devoted to its first anniversary, *Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii* 9 (2013).
32 See the interview with Khalid Mishaal, the Hamas leader, and Prokhanov's article "Slava Khamas!" in *Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii* 1 (2014): 85–105; *Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii* 3 (2013) (for when Prokhanov, Mikhail Leontev, and Maksim

Shevchenko met with Bashar al-Assad in Syria); and "Iran nebesnyi i Rossiia nebesnaia," *Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii* 6 (2015): 20–41.

33 Aleksandr Prokhanov, "Strategicheskii bombardirovshchik 'Izborkskii Klub,'" *Zavtra*, August 21, 2014, http://zavtra.ru/content/view/strategicheskij-bombardirovschik-izborskij-klub/.

34 On Rodina, see Laruelle, *In the Name of the Nation*, 102–118.

35 See, for instance, "Aleksei Zhuravlev i partiia Rodina podderzhivaiut Aleksandra Prokhanova," Rodina, November 21, 2014, http://rodina.ru/novosti/Aleksej-Zhuravlyov-i-partiya-RODINA-podderzhivayut-Aleksandra-Proxanova.

36 "Medinskii vse-taki priekhal v 'Izborskii klub' patriotov i vystupil s zaiavleniem," *Newsru.com*, September 8, 2012, www.newsru.com/russia/08sep2012/medinsky.html.

37 *Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii* 3 (2013): 72.

38 "Izborskii klub i novaia ideologiia: Replika Aleksandra Prokhanova," *Vesti.ru*, June 21, 2014, www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=1706416#.

39 *Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii* 3 (2013): 86.

40 *Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii* 1 (2013): 6.

41 *Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii* 3 (2013): 23.

42 Ibid., 46–47.

43 Ibid., 47.

44 Ibid., 51. However, this subtle interpretation is not universally accepted. Some Club members, such as Gen. Leonid Ivashov, advance more classical arguments to explain the events of 1917: the Tsarist elites were too European and forgot their own country, which was "fooled" by the Bolsheviks, who were mostly Jewish, but thanks to Stalin, by the end of World War II the senior leadership consisted of new Russians and patriots (ibid., 33).

45 The Time of Troubles is the term conventionally used to describe the years of interregnum between the death of the last Rurik Dynasty tsar in 1598 and the establishment of the Romanov Dynasty in 1613.

46 *Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii* 3 (2013): 53.

47 *Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii* 1 (2013): 3.

48 *Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii* 6 (2013): 12.

49 The icon is on the cover of the *Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii* 4 (2015), and its story is told in pictures over the first several pages of this issue.

50 Aleksandr Prokhanov, "Misticheskii stalinizm," *Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii* 4 (2015): 78–81.

51 *Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii* 7 (2015): 4.

52 However, she published a book in the Club's series on one of her pet topics, the notion of Russian world. See Natalia Narochnitskaia, *Sosredotochenie Rossii: Bitva za russkii mir* (Moscow: Knizhnyi mir, 2015).

53 *Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii* 6 (2013): 23.

54 See Peter Rutland, "By Glorifying WWI, Putin Ignores Its Tragedy," *The Moscow Times*, August 4, 2014, www.themoscowtimes.com/opinion/article/by-glorifying-wwi-putin-ignores-its-tragedy/504549.html.

55 *Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii* 1 (2013): 5.

56 *Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii* 10 (2013): 15.

57 "Simfoniia narodov vyezdnoe zasedanie Izborskogo kluba v Iakutii" and "Moi Dagestan," in *Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii* 10 (2013): 12–26. See also, on nationalism, "Rossiia: Skhvatka narodov ili garmoniia," *Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii* 1 (2014): 4–19.

58 On Dugin, see, for instance, Andreas Umland, "Pathological Tendencies in Russian 'Neo-Eurasianism': The Significance of the Rise of Aleksandr Dugin for the Interpretation of Public Life in Contemporary Russia," *Russian Politics and Law* 47, no. 1 (2009): 76–89; Shekhovtsov, "Is Dugin a Traditionalist?"; and Anton Shekhovtsov, "Aleksandr Dugin's Transformation from a Lunatic Fringe Figure into a Mainstream

Political Publicist, 1980–1998: A Case Study in the Rise of Late and Post-Soviet Russian Fascism," *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 1, no. 2 (2010): 144–152.

59 *Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii* 6 (2013): 15.
60 *Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii* 9 (2013): 20, 96.
61 *Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii* 5 (2013): 50.
62 Ahnenerbe was the Nazi institution in charge of finding new evidence of the racial heritage of the Germanic people, researching the history of the Aryan race, and promoting occult knowledge of world history.
63 *Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii* 10 (2013): 94–103.
64 *Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii* 6 (2013): 16–17.
65 *Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii* 2 (2014): 17.
66 Brudny, *Reinventing Russia*, 156.
67 *Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii* 5 (2013): 5.
68 *Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii* 1 (2013): 6.
69 *Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii* 2 (2014): 14.
70 *Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii* 6 (2014): 61–75.
71 *Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii* 5 (2013): 86.
72 *Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii* 3 (2014): 100.
73 *Izborskii klub: Russkie strategii* 6 (2014): 86.

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Part III

Nationalism as political battlefield

In the streets, for or against the Kremlin

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7 Black shirts, White Power

The changing faces of the far right

In the early 1990s, the rediscovery of émigré culture and a feeling of "bonding" with the rich legacy of Russia abroad translated into a huge publishing wave of the main émigré authors, many of whom – such as Ivan Ilyin (1883–1954) or Ivan Solonevich (1891–1953) – had ambiguous relations to the fascist regimes of their time. Moreover, like many European countries, Russia has experienced the emergence and establishment of several parties and organizations that advance far-right themes. Some believe strongly in their legitimacy as a political solution for Russia; others play on the provocative glamorization of everything fascist to boost their countercultural claims. This chapter explores this kaleidoscope, proceeding from Pamiat's offspring on the radical right to the different forms under which the "black shirts" transformed themselves to advocate a "white nationalism" more in tune with their Western counterparts.

Old-fashioned fascism as the answer to the Soviet collapse

Pamiat, the nationalist hub of the early 1980s, proved short-lived. With the acceleration of Gorbachev's reforms in 1987, the organization began a long and painful series of schisms – whether ideological or personality-driven – before collapsing completely with the introduction of a multi-party system in 1990. Nonetheless, all the nationalist-oriented parties and groups that emerged during that tumultuous period claimed continuity with the original organization. In so doing, they proved how symbolically strong the reference to the first Pamiat continued to be. The golden age of Russian nationalism is rooted in the last years of the Soviet regime prior to its democratization, the only historical moment when all those who shared nationalist values found themselves able to cooperate within a unified structure.

While dying a slow death, Pamiat gave birth to several competing movements: a minority moved toward monarchism and Black Hundreds' celebrations, while the majority championed more openly ideological elements of the fascist repertoire. Never confronted with the reality of being in power, the many disparate formations that emerged from Pamiat had neither a clear strategy nor a sophisticated doctrine. All experienced legal difficulties, whether for inciting racial hatred, fiscal fraud, illegal weapons possession, or lucrative illicit activities, particularly related

to providing private security services. All displayed typical fascist elements: the cult of the leader, the celebration of violence, the belief in a widespread plot against Russia that unites enemies of all kinds, the exaltation of military and paramilitary actions, and doctrines calling for a reactionary revolution. They structured the far-right scene not so much for doctrinal experiments – which were relatively weakly articulated – as for engineering nationalist militias, which came to the fore during the events of October 1993 and post-Soviet secessionist conflicts.

The first black shirts: Barkashov's Russian National Unity

Four main parties were born from Pamiat. The National Republican Party of Russia (*Natsional'no-respublikanskaia partiia Rossii*) was the first, launched by Nikolai Lysenko (1961), a former epizoologist. Inviting his partisans to resign themselves to the collapse of the Soviet Union, and inspired by the ideas of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (1918–2008), Lysenko called for the birth of a Russian state that would encompass Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and northern Kazakhstan, and for the revival of "purified" Russian spiritual values. The party established a Russian National Legion and sent militias into conflict zones in Moldova and Georgia.[1] In 1993, Lysenko won a seat in the Duma as an independent candidate from a small town close to Saratov, but the party suffered a major schism the following year when Iuri Beliaev (1956), a former militiaman with anti-Semitic and neo-pagan views, left to establish his own movement. In 1995, Lysenko entered the media spotlight for snatching a cross from the neck of celebrated priest and former dissident Gleb Iakunin (1934–2014). Arrested in 1996, he was freed the following year, but in 1998 the Ministry of Justice refused to re-register his party.[2]

The People's National Party (*Narodnaia natsional'naia partiia*), founded in 1994 by film director Aleksandr Ivanov-Sukharevskii (1950) and underground poet Aleksei Shiropaev (1959), was more directly inspired by Italian fascism. It portrayed itself as a defender of Orthodoxy, claiming contacts in the Moscow Patriarchate and backing from Cossack movements. The party promulgated an ideology it called "Russism" (*rusizm*), which was a combination of populism, racial and anti-Semitic mysticism, national-ecologism, Orthodoxy, and monarchist nostalgia.[3] Even though it had only a few thousand members, it influenced the radical scene through well-known newspapers such as *Ia – russkii* (I Am Russian), *Nasledie predkov* (The Heritage of Ancestors), and *Era Rossii* (the Era of Russia). It was also the first party to engage skinheads in politics. It rapidly experienced legal problems over the incitement of interethnic hatred and only managed to get a few members elected in the 1995 local elections. Its main newspaper, *Ia – russkii*, was eventually banned in 1999 and Ivanov-Sukharevskii was sentenced to several months in prison. Upon his release, he tried to resume his party's activities, but with little success. Wounded in an attack on the party's headquarters in 2003, he subsequently disappeared from the far-right scene.

The Russian National Union (*Russkii natsional'nyi soiuz*), created in 1993 by Aleksei Vdovin (1958) and Konstantin Kasimovskii (1974), was more radical in

its views on racial theories and its rehabilitation of Hitler.[4] It combined references to the monarchy, the Black Hundreds, and Orthodoxy, but also appealed to a non-Marxist kind of socialism and the restoration of a "pagan order." A paramilitary organization known for its readiness to engage in violent action, the Union drew attention to itself by committing violent acts against religious groups it considered to be sects. The movement waned in 1997, due first to Vdovin's departure and then to the Minister of Justice's refusal to authorize the publication of its newspaper, *Shturmovik* (The Storm Trooper – another open Nazi reference). In 1998, Kasimovskii unsuccessfully tried to launch the National Front, along with neo-pagan leader Ilia Lazarenko and Andrei Saveliev, future adviser to Dmitrii Rogozin.

These three parties were overshadowed by the incredible success and longevity of another heir to Pamiat, Russian National Unity (*Russkoe natsional'noe edinstvo*, RNE). Its leader, Aleksandr Barkashov (1953), an electrician by training and a passionate admirer of both karate and history's great conquerors, joined the Pamiat movement in 1985 and, along with Dmitrii Vasiliev, became one of its principal figures.[5] In 1990, the two men went their separate ways: Barkashov rejected Pamiat's Orthodox and Tsarist nostalgia, denouncing what he called its "brasserie patriotism" (*kvasnoi patriotizm*), and decided to launch his own movement. The RNE portrayed itself not only as a political party, but also as a mass movement ready to defend Russian interests against hostile elements. During the October 1993 confrontation between Yeltsin and the parliament, the RNE patrolled around the White House on behalf of the rebel parliamentarians and controlled entry to the Supreme Soviet building. Its militias were folded into the Ministry of Defense troops that remained loyal to the parliament. Two of its members were killed, the movement was temporarily banned, and Barkashov was arrested and imprisoned for a short period.[6] When he was released in February 1994, his prestige within the nationalist movement was at its apogee, buoyed by the participation of RNE volunteers in the secessionist conflicts in Transnistria and South Ossetia.[7]

RNE borrowed symbols from fascism, and particularly from Nazism: the swastika; the Hitler salute; the slogan "One Nation, One People, One State"; the black paramilitary uniforms for members; and multiple references to the program of the NSDAP, including a mixed economy and eugenics. What set the RNE apart from other radical associations was its racist definition of the Russian nation, as illustrated in its handbook, *The ABC of a Russian Nationalist* (*Azbuka russkogo natsionalista*), which Barkashov published in 1992. The party explicitly defended the "genetic purity of the Russian nation" and considered linguistic and religious elements to be less salient than blood ties; it thought the interests of the nation superior to those of the state, which it wanted to become an ethnic entity at the service of a titular Russian people; and it called for a ban on mixed marriages. The party expressed a belief in an anti-Russian plot on the part of the world's cosmopolitans, refused to condemn Christianity despite cultivating neo-pagan innuendo, and tried to demonstrate Christ's Aryanness and Slavicness.[8] Barkashov celebrated fascist Italy and Nazi Germany for having

freed themselves from Jewish domination;[9] he also praised the Romanian Iron Guard. In an interview for *Den'*, Barkashov declared his admiration for Nazism, going so far as to claim that Hitler was right to consider the Slavs worthy of extermination[10] – a remark he later had to retract, explaining that Hitler had betrayed the true principles of national socialism by invading the Soviet Union.[11] Barkashov also progressively integrated more Orthodox symbols; he invited priests to party meetings, while party members attended key religious celebrations.

Between 1993 and 1997, the RNE was the foremost radical nationalist organization in Russia, with about 15,000 active members and between 50,000 and 100,000 supporters, as well as the vague backing of approximately 10 percent of the population.[12] Its newspaper, *Russkii poriadok* (Russian Order), even if published irregularly, claimed tens of thousands of readers. The RNE had a considerable territorial network: it comprised about 350 regional organizations, of which 100 were officially registered, making it the fourth-largest organization in the country after the Communist Party, the first presidential party Democratic Choice of Russia, and Zhirinovsky's LDPR. Its internal structure was strictly hierarchical: membership involved several caste-like levels that could be attained only after intensive training.[13] Once this training was successfully completed, the new partisans (*soratniki*) led small groups of about ten persons, which were in turn integrated into a larger pyramidal structure. The party offered members the chance to either engage in a volunteer militia or work in the private security sector for businessmen sympathetic to the party.

Local RNE chapters registered as sporting clubs or centers for military preparedness, whose members patrolled alongside state police. The wealthiest groups specialized in paramilitary training (weapons-handling, martial arts, hand-to-hand combat, and parachute jumping) and were well-equipped with all-terrain vehicles, trucks, boats, and weapons; they also attended training camps. The RNE appeared to have developed close contacts with key ministries, such as the Interior and the Defense.[14] It regularly collaborated with regional military units and, with the discreet backing of the authorities, imposed order in the streets, notably in Voronezh, Stavropol, and Krasnodar. The movement also boasted "mobile units" for Moscow and the surrounding region, which could have been used to initiate guerrilla warfare. A significant number of its members worked in the security organs, and it also recruited street kids to swell its ranks. Several Communist leaders, including Ziuganov himself, used RNE bodyguards when they traveled.[15]

Despite enjoying the benevolence of the Russian authorities, the RNE later became more critical of the Kremlin, violently denouncing the 1996 Khasavyurt agreements that put an end to the first war in Chechnya. As a result, the party suddenly found itself a target of Kremlin attacks. In 1998, it was the subject of a widespread campaign against the "fascist threat" orchestrated by then-mayor of Moscow Iurii Luzhkov, who prevented the party from holding its annual congress in the capital.[16] Barkashov was dismissed from the RNE leadership in 2000, and the movement gradually disappeared from the political scene across

the country. In 2009, Barkashov unsuccessfully tried to relaunch the movement as the "Union of the Defenders of Russia – October 1993," a name that openly proclaimed its backward-looking nature.[17] Even defunct, the RNE's successes and methods remain a powerful reference for the radical nationalist camp; it is an exemplar for all those who dream of a blackshirt movement in Russia. Its prestige would be revived with the 2014 Ukrainian war (see Chapter 9). The only other movement that could compete with the RNE in "controlling the streets" was the National Bolsheviks.

National Bolsheviks: when punk meets Mussolini

In 1992, some of Zhirinovsky's countercultural allies grew disillusioned with him and created a new organization, the National Radical Party, which then became the Revolutionary Opposition and later the National Bolshevik Party (*Natsional-bolshevitskaia partiia*, NBP). From its earliest days, the movement has been led by the poet and best-selling novelist Eduard Limonov (1943). After living a bohemian life in Moscow, Limonov emigrated to the United States in 1974 before resettling in France in the early 1980s. While living abroad, he became a best-selling writer, the celebrated author of *It's Me, Eddie* (1979), among other titles. In 1990, Limonov, still based in France, began writing for the conservative *Sovetskaia Rossiia* newspaper. He moved to Moscow in 1992 and rapidly became a close adviser to Zhirinovsky and a member of the LDPR "shadow government." Much like the RNE, the National Bolshevik movement crystallized with the events of October 1993: while the conservative putsch against Mikhail Gorbachev in 1991 had triggered the resistance of countercultural milieus, the 1993 conflict brought these counterculture groups out into the streets, this time in opposition to Boris Yeltsin. Very rapidly, the *Natsboly* (as the National Bolsheviks are known in Russian) developed a unique style of political expression and a culture of violent protest that would shape Russian youth subcultures, especially leftist-statist and anarchist, for the years to come.

In the second half of the 1990s, the NBP lagged behind the RNE both in terms of the number of its activists (probably around 5,000) and its territorial visibility (with local sections in 40 of Russia's then 89 federal subjects and in some of the former Soviet republics).[18] The party newspaper, *Limonka*, had a large circulation, which sources place at between 12,000 and 50,000 copies. Registered in 1997, the party was stripped of official recognition a year later, and its applications for registration have been systematically denied ever since. Since then, the NBP has specialized in violent street actions in the manner of radical leftist alt-globalist movements.[19] Its adoption of these tactics alienated some members, who left in search of a more intellectualized approach to National Bolshevism, and the movement faced multiple schisms, though it remained the prototype for leftist culture activism in Russia.[20]

The NBP's radical anti-Putinism earned it the wrath of the regime. First arrested in 2001 for an attempted coup in the Kazakhstani city of Ust-Kamenogorsk, Limonov spent 15 months in prison before being freed in 2003.

His absence did not slow down the party's street activities, which became more and more directed against representatives of power. In 2005, the Court of Justice deprived the NBP of its legal status. The party lodged a complaint at the European Court in Strasbourg, but in 2007 the Russian court confirmed its classification of the NBP as an extremist party and thus banned in Russia.[21] Thereafter, NBP members presented themselves as "Limonov supporters" (*Limonovtsy*) rather than National Bolsheviks so as to avoid legal action.

In the 2000s, Limonov moved closer to the liberal opposition and found the "Other Russia" movement, a bid to unify Vladimir Putin's opponents that was led by liberals Garry Kasparov (the chess grandmaster) and former prime minister Mikhail Kasyanov (1957). Taking the non-governmental organizations that had participated in the "color revolutions" of the years 2003–2005 as its model, Other Russia aimed to organize targeted protests and thus demonstrate the existence of an organized Russian civil society capable of becoming a structured opposition.[22] This move toward alliance with the liberals naturally prompted several schisms within the NBP. Limonov's supporters continued to participate in the democratic opposition's "Dissenters' Marches" and later launched Strategy-31, a series of protests held on the thirty-first of the month.[23] Allying with West-looking liberals strained the movement's ideology, and during the anti-Putin protests of 2011–2012, Limonov gradually reoriented himself away from the liberal camp. In 2014, he abruptly shifted from his unwavering anti-Putinism to support the president, celebrating annexation of Crimea – an easy step, since the party has always called for a new imperial Russia with an irredentist agenda for regions populated by ethnic Russians, such as northern Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Estonia, and Latvia.[24]

This zigzagging political stance encapsulates the ideological complexity and eclectic nature of the National Bolshevik Party. According to Vyacheslav Likhachev, the NBP can be interpreted as "a party of general extremism."[25] Its principle is that of an explicit miscegenation of contradictory doctrines from both the far right and the far left, based on the idea that in order to challenge the system, paradox should be the new norm. Inspired by the concept of the Third Way and the German Conservative Revolution, the NBP asserted that national revolution and social revolution emanate from one and the same principle, and that the extremes of left and right should join forces in the name of a "general principle of uprising."[26]

Limonov adopted the fascist salute and made many positive allusions to Mussolini and Hitler. In the 1990s, the party instituted a new dress code for street actions, inspired by the black shirts of Italian fascists: the Polushkin brothers, famous alternative fashion designers, called it *fash-fashion*.[27] In 1995, *Limonka* published a series of definitions of fascism:

> Fascism is active pessimism; fascism is left nationalism; fascism is social romanticism; […] the futuristic impulse; […] the will to die; […] the celebration of a heroic style; […] anarchism plus totalitarianism; […] loyalty to the sources and aspiration to the future.[28]

Yet the NBP blended this exaltation of fascism with a celebration of Lenin, Stalin, Beria, the Bolshevik Revolution, and Soviet culture. The party flag displayed a hammer and a sickle, while *Limonka* developed a fascinating visual style inspired by Bolshevik propaganda of the 1920s and 1930s. It referenced anarchism and both left-wing and right-wing terrorist groups from the 1970s (as well as criminal and cult leader Charles Manson), celebrating violence as positive and war as the peak of human existence.

During his time as an NBP member, Dugin tried to bring some doctrinal consistency to the party, but failed and exited. The party's ideology therefore remained grounded, first and foremost, in Limonov's personality, his life experiences, and his aesthetics, thus offering more a style than a doctrine. Long disillusioned with the West, Limonov has always considered provocation and dark satire the most profound and genuine way to describe human experiences and the contemporary world; he belongs, in that sense, to the tradition of Iurii Mamleev, the founder of the dissident Iuzhinskii Circle. Yet Limonov was not a member of the Circle during his decades in Moscow; rather, he discovered one of its cult authors, Julius Evola, while an émigré. More important, NBP culture is rooted in the appropriation of punk culture by Soviet underground circles in the 1970s and 1980s and the hipster style that both Limonov and Dugin cultivated. Limonov's decadent texts, with explicit homosexual allusions, have regularly shocked the most conservative section of the nationalist camp,[29] yet violating the social boundaries of conventional masculinity is nothing new. Nazi and neo-Nazi culture has always displayed some ambiguity toward male homosexuality and played with aesthetics of "gayness."[30]

As analyzed by Fabrizio Fenghi, the NBP's ideology should be understood as "a kind of *stiob*, a form of parody based on overidentification with its object that Alexei Yurchak has shown to be a fundamental feature of late Soviet and early post-Soviet culture."[31] This feature is visible in the revolutionary hyperbole used and abused by the party, its deliberately grotesque slogans, and the hand grenade (*limonka*) iconography that became the hallmark of the movement. The NBP aims to embody a political and artistic avant-garde and cultivates totalitarian aesthetics. This cult of anarchist heroism and the glamorization of fascism has been promoted among youth by rock singer Egor Letov (1964–2008) and music magazine *Russkii rok* (Russian Rock), which was one of the first countercultural journals to take a decidedly nationalist tack. The party also financed the publication of the heavy metal newspaper *Zheleznyi marsh* (Iron March) and developed close ties with well-known rock groups, such as Grazhdanskaia Oborona (Civic Defense), Korroziia Metalla (Metal Corrosion), Nikolaus Kopernik, and composer Sergei Kuriokhin (1954–1996).

The NBP tested an experimental ideology inspired by fascist references, but it took a distinctive trajectory that made it a unique case on Russia's ideological landscape. It remained faithful to its original mix of far right and far left and advanced an unusual doctrinal stance: a call for totalitarian violence, colored by the glamorization of fascism *and* references to early Soviet culture and Bolshevism. It distinguishes itself from other radical movements by its lack of anti-Semitism and its refusal to advance an anti-migrant agenda; until the annexation

of Crimea, it focused on denouncing the Putin regime. The NBP indirectly inspired the rebirth of leftist movements in the late 2000s, such as Sergei Udaltsov's (1977) Vanguard of Red Youth (*Avangard krasnoi molodezhi*) and several other, smaller Communist or Trotskyist groups. Most significantly, the NBP crafted an aesthetic style of protest and provocation that fundamentally shaped Russian countercultures.

The structuring of White Power *à la russe*

While Russian far-right groups have always been marginal in terms of visibility and membership – with the RNE and the NBP the only two exceptions – at the end of the 1990s a new, broader phenomenon emerged: skinheads (*britogolovnye* or "shaved heads" in Russian, or *skinkhedy*). Skinheads deeply transformed the far-right scene by bringing new methods of street action, targeting violence against migrants, recruiting younger members, and moving away from ideological debates to a more instinctive racism. Progressively shut down in the early 2010s, the skinhead world transformed to give birth to a new generation of far-right leaders in search of respectability. But its critical, long-term legacy is to have shifted the ideological backbone of the Russian far right from classic fascist or post-fascist doctrines to a "White Power" scheme that allows Russia to dialog with the West.

The rise and collapse of the skinhead scene

Born in Great Britain in the 1960s before spreading to the rest of Europe, particularly Germany, the skinhead movement was, from the outset, far from homogeneous. Leading strands included, first, the neo-Nazi tendency called Bonehead; second, the anarchist-inspired Redskins, who carry on the movement's original internationalist tradition; and third, a depoliticized strain called SHARP (Skinheads Against Racial Prejudices). This last group rejects the racism of the Boneheads as much as the leftist references of the Redskins, limiting itself to expressing its counterculture through music, clothing, and communal living. In Russia, there are a few Redskins; most of them are anarchists and members of militant anti-fascist groups, as well as NBP supporters who, sporting Lenin or Che Guevara T-shirts, specialize in fighting against neo-Nazis. Boneheads overwhelmingly dominate the Russian skinhead landscape.[32]

The Russian skinhead movement resembles the Western model and combines a racial ideology of defending White Power with provocative lifestyles and fashions, as well as violent street actions.[33] It is linked to the informal movements that emerged from the underground punk culture that has been developing in Russia's big cities since the 1980s.[34] The first Soviet skinheads appeared in the Baltic republics at the end of the 1980s, emerging among youth who claimed to be fighting Soviet occupation. The phenomenon then took root in Russia, particularly in Moscow, with a few hundred adherents. In the early 1990s, the skinheads mainly agitated in soccer stadiums, provoking brawls among fans, and at

skinhead concerts called *Oï!*, the Anglo-Saxon version of *Heil!* They would show up in small groups of 10 to 20 people, bearing slogans such as "Russia for the Russians" and "Moscow for the Muscovites." Though initially informal and decentralized, the movement became more organized during the second half of the decade. Around 1996, two powerful associations appeared: the Moscow Skin Legion and the Russian section of Blood and Honor, which operated in groups of around 200 people. In 1998, they were joined by the 88 United Brigades (OB 88),[35] born of the unification of several small movements in the Russian section of the international Hammerskin Organization.

In the second half of the 1990s, the skinhead movement transitioned from being a sport- and concert-centered youth subculture to more political concerns. Several far-right parties, fascinated by this violent subculture, tried to co-opt the skinheads as youth movements. Aleksandr Kasimovskii's Russian National Union launched a small skinhead group called Russian Action and glorified their violent exploits in its newspaper, *Shturmovik*.[36] Aleksandr Ivanov-Sukharevskii's National People's Party managed to form close ties with St. Petersburg skinhead groups through the dissemination of its newspaper, *Ia – russkii*. The skinhead leader Semion Tokmakov (1975) joined the party in 2003 and launched a youth movement. Iurii Beliaev's Freedom Party also maintained close links with various St. Petersburg skinhead groups and educated them, using Aryanist and racist discourse, on the greatness of the Russian people and the white race. The politicization of Russian skinheads also intensified due to the activism of several Western organizations that, starting in 1997, came to Russia to share their organizational experience and diffuse ideological convictions, including the German Vikings (banned in the Federal Republic of Germany) and US members of the Ku Klux Klan.

In the 1990s, the American white supremacy movement, searching for renewed inspiration, interpreted the Soviet collapse and the "rebirth" of Russia as a sign of the vitality of the "white race," which had been able to defeat communism. Interviewed for Prokhanov's newspaper *Den'*, former grand wizard of the Ku Klux Klan (and former Republican Louisiana state representative) David Duke (1950) affirmed: "In my opinion, the destruction of White Russia would be a great explosion for all of Europe. It would be the end of the European blood heritage. If Russia is destroyed, all of us – including Americans – will be destroyed."[37] Duke made Russia his new darling, visiting the country at least three times between 1999 and 2001 to promote the Russian translation of his book *My Awakening: A Path to Racial Understanding* (translated into Russian as *Evreiskii vopros glazami amerikantsa* [The Jewish question through the eyes of an American]). In it, he claimed: "Russia is a white nation! … In my opinion, Russia and other Eastern countries have the greatest chance of having racially aware parties achiev[e] political power."[38] Duke's book was reportedly available at the State Duma bookstore at a very affordable price, and the first printing of 5,000 copies quickly sold out.[39] Another booklet, *The ABC of Slavic Skinheads* (*Azbuka slavianskikh britogolovykh*), has been widely disseminated on the Russian-language Internet.[40] In 2004, Duke reiterated his belief that "Russia has

a greater sense of racial understanding among its population than does any other predominantly White nation."[41] In addition, he visited Ukraine several times in the mid-2000s on the invitation of the Interregional Academy of Personnel Management, a private higher educational institution that is known for hosting anti-Semitic personalities.[42]

Theories about the defense of the white race are prevalent among Russian skinheads. In the 2000s, newer groups adopted names with increasingly explicit references to their Russian and white identity: Russian Objective, Russian Attack, Russian Kulak, but also White Patrol and White Hunters. For years, the best-organized and most politicized group was Slavic Union (*Slavianskii soiuz*), later renamed Slavic Strength (*Slavianskaia sila*), the Russian abbreviation of which is SS. It could gather up to 5,000 members.[43] Its leader, Dmitrii Demushkin (1979), a former member of the RNE, has a long arrest record, including an incident in 2006 when he was suspected of having participated in a bomb attack on an Islamic prayer center in a Moscow suburb. Demushkin is called "Führer" by his supporters, borrows his ideological precepts from the RNE, and proclaims that only national socialism can save Russia from the Judeo-Masonic threat and the so-called Zionist Occupation Government (ZOG) – a classic conspiracy theory also spread in the US and the Middle East.[44]

Some skinhead groups were integrated into Western organizations such as the Hammerskins and Blood and Honor. On an ideological level, they draw their inspiration from the discourse of the American White Power movement; the most radical promote the racist and exterminationist theories of historical Nazism. They dress in a manner akin to Anglo-Saxon skinheads and sport Celtic crosses, swastikas, the SS lightning bolt insignia, and the Totenkopf (death skull) of the SS combat formations.[45] Other groups have increasingly preferred to emphasize specifically Russian or Slavic traditions, hence they march under the imperial Russian flag (white, yellow, and black) during their street demonstrations. All groups share a culture typified by newspaper titles such as *Pod nol'* (No Hair Left), *Beloe soprotivlenie* (White Opposition), *Otvertka* (Screwdriver), and *Zheleznyi marsh* (The Iron March). Music is a key form of identification for them: groups such as Totenkopf and Terror National Front are very popular. Reciprocally, some singers, such as Sergei Zharikov (1956), who were close associates of Zhirinovsky at the start of the 1990s, today profess neo-Nazism. Two other groups, Kolovrat (Swastika) and Vandal, have song lyrics that refer to Aryan ideas.[46] Skinhead followers of "white rock" frequently pick fights with fans at rap, reggae, and punk concerts.

Relatively few sociological or anthropological studies on Russian skinheads are available to better identify the social milieus that are prone to this form of youth violence.[47] In the 1990s, many of the skinhead recruits seem to have been street kids, school dropouts with no career prospects or means of economic survival other than petty delinquency. Soccer stadiums and concerts were their primary space for expression. As of the 2000s, however, the movement gentrified: new recruits began to come largely from the middle classes. No longer did they consider their enemies to be only "foreigners"; they included cultural

opponents such as punks, rappers, National Bolsheviks, anarchists, alter-globalists, LGBTQ communities, and so forth. Big cities' skinheads were wealthier, wore expensive clothing, had greater access to communication technologies, and were more Westernized in their daily life. They were also distinguished by their calls for economic protectionism; as the children of small business owners, they objected to the labor competition allegedly posed by immigrants. These big-city skinheads were more politicized than those in small towns, who were younger, poorer, and represented a youth delinquent subculture marked, above all, by depoliticization.[48]

Skinheads began perpetrating racist attacks near Patrice Lumumba Peoples' Friendship University, which has hosted foreign students, particularly from sub-Saharan Africa and East Asia, since Soviet times. They also regularly gathered in areas around the center of Moscow – on Arbat Street or in front of the S.P. Gorbunov Palace of Culture, formerly Pamiat's main meeting-place. They originally portrayed themselves as "Moscow's streetcleaners" (*chistil'shchiki moskovskikh ulits*), attacking gypsies and people of color, as well as the homeless. However, they rapidly began to plan larger-scale actions, which they filmed and then broadcast on the Internet and social media. They demonstrated higher levels of logistical efficiency, with websites that offered advice on handling weapons and attack methods.[49] Beginning in 1998, they timed their attacks to coincide with specific anniversaries, especially Hitler's birthday on April 20. They played a driving role in anti-migrant riots, fueling the conflict by spreading the word and helping organize gatherings.[50]

The rise of violent "migrantophobia"

In the second half of the 2000s, as street violence perpetrated by skinhead groups peaked, another phenomenon took shape: interethnic skirmishes involving far-right youth groups or ordinary citizens.

One turning point was the Kondopoga pogrom in 2006. In this small town in Karelia, a brawl broke out between individuals who identified themselves as Russian and those who identified themselves as Caucasian, resulting in the deaths of two people and prompting massive riots (involving more than 2,000 people) against the town's Caucasian population, particularly Chechens. The Russian population vented its frustrations on the Caucasians, looting and burning their businesses and calling for them to be expelled. The police took a long time to intervene, while local authorities seemed content with the "cleansing" of their town.[51] As the number of such interethnic skirmishes grew, often between young gangs defined as "ethnic Russians" and "North Caucasians," the authorities began to worry about these groups' capacity to target not only migrants but also law-enforcement agencies and symbols of state power.

Several events combined to confirm the mobilizational power of these youth groups. In 2010, after the murder of a soccer fan, around 5,000 nationalists carrying racist banners and chanting slogans occupied central Moscow's Manezh Square. The "Russian Marches" of November 4 of the same year denounced the

ineffectiveness of the security forces and condemned the Russian government's migration policy. In 2013, following the murder of a "Russian" by someone identified as "Chechen," a crowd of hundreds of people went to the Chechen district of Pugachev, a small town in the Saratov region, to brawl. This was followed by an unsanctioned rally demanding that the authorities "liberate" the city from North Caucasians. In October 2013, Biryulyovo, a commuter community for Moscow workers, experienced xenophobic riots when a Caucasian allegedly stabbed an ethnic Russian, with public opinion fanning the flames. Using social media, groups of youths orchestrated street fights to settle scores and looted nearby shops belonging to ethnic minorities. Many local residents took to the streets. Although demonstrators complained that "migrants make the laws" and "locals no longer feel at home" – two common formulations of xenophobic sentiments elsewhere in the world – they also protested alleged corruption among the security forces and municipal authorities.

Some radical politicians tried to capitalize on youth violence and used it as the basis of political legitimacy. Several figures from the LDPR, including the deputies Aleksandr Kurianovich (1966) and Aleksei Mitrofanov (1962), did not hide their support for skinhead actions, deeming them to be simple acts of defense by ethnic Russians under attack from foreigners. Dmitrii Rogozin's Rodina party, which fixated on the alleged threat that migrants posed to the country, was enthusiastic about the Kondopoga interethnic riots and the role of skinheads in "awakening" the Russian nation.

For several years, Aleksandr Belov and his DPNI movement attempted to mediate between Russian politicians and skinhead groups. The DPNI, launched in 2002, refused any doctrinal engagement in order to avoid ideological schisms and argued that only "migrantophobia" could unify the Russian far right. The movement reached the peak of its influence in 2006: it was the main engine of the Kondopoga riots and took the lead on the Russian Marches. Under the leadership of the DPNI, the March began featuring some representatives of the American White Power sporting cowboy hats, an extremely rare cultural symbol in Russia.[52] Belov has been indeed close to a friend of David Duke and Wiginton, who attended several DPNI meetings and Russian Marches, and organized American hate rock bands in Russia in 2017.[53] In 2008, at the DPNI's first congress, Belov announced a shift in strategy, moving away from radicalism in order to transform the DPNI into a "respectable nationalist movement with European tendencies" on the model of the French Front National, Italy's Lega Nord, or the Alliance for the Future of Austria.[54] He called for a new nationalism "not with a beard and enormous boots, but in a suit and tie."[55] Although many members rejected this new strategy, leading to schisms that weakened the movement,[56] it nevertheless set the tone and confirmed that certain young far-right leaders such as Belov recognized the potential legitimacy to be gained by presenting themselves as Russian versions of Jean-Marie Le Pen, Matteo Salvini or Jorg Haider and by developing links with the US alt-right.

The DPNI was one of several radical groups competing to capture the skinhead market, including the Pan-National Russian Union (*Russkii obshchenatsional'nyi soiuz*, RONS). Founded by Igor Artemov (1964) in 1990 and banned by judicial

authorities in 2011, RONS was one of the longest-lived far-right organizations. Marked by the increasing involvement of skinheads, it followed a process of ideological radicalization, moving from promoting Orthodoxy to the fight against the "ZOG," as symbolized by its newspaper *Belyi rubezh* (White Frontier). Other competitors were Dmitrii Rumiantsev's National Socialist Society (*Natsional'noe sotsialisticheskoe obshchestvo*), particularly visible in 2005–2007, which openly called for racist murders, and later the more violent Fighting Organization of Russian Nationalists (*Boevaia organizatsiia russkikh natsionalistov*, or BORN).

Concerned about the politicization of the skinhead movement, which was promoting increasingly anti-Putin slogans, the authorities tried to divide the radical scene by promoting more conciliatory groups, such as Russkii Obraz (Russian Image). Originally a journal, Russkii Obraz became a political group that attracted skinheads by offering a well-elaborated, media-savvy ideology that combined "European-style" nationalism – references to the Irish Republican movement, for instance – with an orientation toward pan-Slavic nationalism and especially solidarity with Serbia (the symbol of the movement was the Constantine Cross). They discreetly featured some Nazi symbols, such as a skull, on their uniforms, and promoted racist theories about the risk of national degeneration of Russians, also celebrated by the movement's rock band, Khuk Sprava (Right Hook). Russkii Obraz called for an apartheid-style regime, with official segregation between "Russian Whites" and migrants, and the banning of interethnic marriages. They also glorified convicts motivated by racism as prisoners of conscience. Russkii Obraz was connected to pro-Kremlin youth organizations such as Rossiia Molodaia through former finance minister Boris Fiodorov (1958–2008), LDPR deputy Nikolai Kurianovich, and Baburin's Popular Union. While the DPNI gradually lost its official connections, Russkii Obraz moved forward: it was authorized to organize its own Russian March on November 4 in order to accelerate the schism within other ultra-nationalist structures.[57] However, the movement slowly lost the trust of the authorities and disappeared. Some of its leaders, such as Nikita Tikhonov, were arrested, tried, and sentenced in 2011 for the murder of lawyer Stanislav Markelov, among many other accusations.[58]

In 2011, after the ban on the DPNI and Demushkin's Slavianskaia Sila, a new coalition emerged: "The Russians" (*Russkie*), which aimed to unify the remaining radical structures – DPNI, SS, Dmitrii Bobrov's National Socialist Initiative, Stanislav Vorobiev's Russian Imperial Movement, and Aleksandr Turik's Union of the Russian People.[59] The coalition embraced a broad ideological spectrum, from Demushkin's evocations of Nazism to movements that confined themselves to denouncing illegal immigration.[60] But Russkie was completely upended by the Ukrainian crisis and collapsed (see Chapter 9), before being officially banned by the Russian authorities in 2015.

The Russian authorities' response to White Power violence

This weakening of the White Power scene can be partly explained by better enforcement of the legislation against ethnic violence and hate speech. For years,

enforcement was lax because some of the state organs had friendly relations with radical nationalist groups, or at least a laissez-faire policy. Local authorities, particularly in Krasnodar, Stavropol, and Pskov, even used skinheads as a street militia. For many years, the Moscow municipality also allowed these movements to "cleanse" the capital of populations deemed undesirable, possibly with the tacit support of then-mayor Iurii Luzhkov.[61] This leniency toward skinheads was evident on an even larger scale within the security services, which focused their efforts on the fight against criminal activities by migrants and ethnic diasporas more than against racist movements. The skinheads indeed enjoyed a great deal of impunity: the militia and the special forces of the Ministry of the Interior (OMON) only half-heartedly intervened in skinhead attacks and sometimes even tacitly supported them. A survey organized by the Levada Center in 2006 revealed that, of the professional categories surveyed, state employees from the Ministry of the Interior had the highest rate of xenophobia (73 percent). Militiamen often considered skinheads to be good patriots and their violence legitimate in defense of ethnic Russians against the alleged aggression of migrants and ethnic minorities.[62]

Russian legislation also struggles to penalize far-right violence. Legislative texts are unclear in their definition of "extremism" and on the relationship between "extremism" and the promotion of fascist or neo-Nazi ideology. The Moscow-based SOVA Center tracks the evolution of legislation and the number of legal actions taken in the name of extremism.[63] By 2016, the Ministry of Justice had forbidden 53 organizations from operating in Russia on the grounds of "extremism." Of these, SOVA considers 24 neo-Nazi, including older skinhead organizations such as Slavic Union, the RNE, and the National Socialist Society, as well as more recent regional ones.[64] The justice organs consider two radical nationalist groups to be "terrorist" movements: the Autonomous Militant Terrorist Organization (*Avtonomnaia boevaia terroristicheskaia organizatsiia*, ABTO) and the Ukrainian movement Pravyi Sektor. Some individuals have been arrested or fined for belonging to an extremist organization, but this number remains limited: only those who organize violent actions are typically tried and jailed.

Several articles of the Penal Code can be used to fight against groups and publications considered to take an excessively extreme nationalist stance. The primary one is Article 282, which concerns incitement to interethnic hatred; since 2007–2008, it has been used widely, mostly against leaders of well-known radical groups. Beginning in 2010, the number of legal actions for "incitement to hatred" increased rapidly as the authorities began targeting Internet and social networks, especially those on VKontakte, the Russian equivalent of Facebook; they blocked accounts, websites, and video sharing. Since 2014, a new trend has emerged, that of combating ultra-nationalist and/or neo-Nazi groups that supported the Euromaidan, such as the leaders of Russkie, Slavianskaia sila, and Restrukt. The Ministry of Justice has also frequently invoked Article 20.3, which aims to fight "propaganda and public demonstration of Nazi attributes and symbols" more specifically. SOVA recorded 11 cases in 2009, 146 in 2015, and

83 in 2016.[65] Since 2007, the Russian authorities have compiled a list of books, songs, and videos forbidden on the national territory due to their Nazi ideology; the list contained almost 4,000 titles as of the end of 2016. A little less than half of them were identified by SOVA as (neo-)Nazi: the classic works of Nazi and Italian fascist authors (Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, works by Himmler, Goebbels, and Mussolini); publications by the main Russian fascist organizations; neo-Nazi websites such as the "Front for Aryan Liberation"; and some songs by famous fascist rock bands like Kolovrat, Tsyklon-B, Bandy Moskvy (Moscow's Bands), and Belye Voiny (White Wars).

The Russian White Power movement remains weak and small compared to its US counterpart. It reached its zenith in the mid-2000s. Although no reliable statistics are available, estimates counted about 50,000 skinheads in Russia in the mid-2000s, spread across about a hundred towns, with around 5,000 in Moscow region and 3,000 in the Leningrad one.[66] At that time, Russia likely had the largest number of skinheads in the world.[67] According to data collected by the SOVA Center, ethnic violence committed by skinheads peaked in 2007–2008.[68] Both skinheads and anti-migrant riots began declining in 2010–2012 under pressure from the federal authorities and some municipalities, including Moscow, which have taken serious steps to clamp down on the phenomenon.[69] Several leaders were arrested and imprisoned: Demushkin was arrested for a few days, while Belov was charged to seven years in jail for embezzlement, among other trumped-up accusations. The Russian Marches also declined from 6,000 participants between 2011 and 2013, to around 1,500 people in 2015.[70]

A generational leadership change also impacted the movement dynamic. As in many European countries, a new segment of the far right has been gradually transforming itself in order to better integrate into the political scene and attract wider popular support by promoting less radical and more populist narratives. Open references to fascist doctrines have declined, replaced by anti-migrant and pro-"Christian values" discourses. With the 2014 war in Ukraine, this trend accelerated as Russian public opinion shifted from anti-migrant to anti-Western sentiments.[71] Since then, the White Power scene has been deeply divided, with no new leaders and weak popular support. Interethnic violence and the number of participants in nationalist marches have both declined dramatically.[72]

* * *

As with every study of political phenomena that does not rely on electoral votes, capturing the representativeness of these far-right trends is challenging. In 2014, the official VKontakte page of Barkashov's Russian National Unity, *Ia – russkii*, had about 224,000 subscribers, and his party, Russkoe Edinstvo – which had been shut down by the authorities – claimed 68,000 members.[73] Both openly displayed national socialist materials and Third Reich iconography, and attract a handful of supporters. However, "milder" discourses on the dangers to Russia allegedly represented by migrants capture a significantly broader segment of the population: around two-thirds of Russian citizens displayed a negative attitude

toward labor migrants from Central Asia and the South and North Caucasus, a number that collapsed after the 2014 Ukrainian crisis to 30–40 percent, yet with still two-thirds wishing that the government would limit migration flows.[74] However, a high level of xenophobia does not imply support for far-right violence and its ideological agenda.

All Russian far-right groups have been characterized by permanent institutional reorganization, alternating periods of support from and repression by the authorities, personal rivalries among leaders, and shaky popular support. They can be roughly divided into three generations: the first leaders, more oriented toward ideology than action, trained during the Pamiat years and active in the 1990s, were replaced in the 2000s by skinhead groups, less attracted by doctrines and promoting a more basic racism, followed by the emergence of a more "politically correct" far right inspired by European populist models. The broader context has also evolved dramatically: the 2011–2012 anti-Putin protests, followed by the 2014 Ukrainian war, profoundly reshaped the landscape of the radical right in Russia and weakened its ideological content. Yet one critical feature has remained relatively stable over time: a direct embrace of historical fascism or national socialism systematically provokes rejection from the Russian public and therefore marginalizes those who claim it. Only Russia-centric references, either to the Black Hundreds or to National Bolshevism, can increase the popularity of far-right ideologies.

The articulations between these grassroots far-right tendencies and the Russian state are multilayered, depending on the moment (whether the Kremlin feels threatened or not) or the place (each city and region has a quite different policy), as well as on the ruling groups: the security services or law-enforcement agencies may protect some far-right groups and target those of their competitors simultaneously. All these articulations exhibit more of a bottom-up dynamic than a top-down one. They show, above all, how skilled the Kremlin is at co-opting movements and ideas that might compete with its own legitimacy. The Kremlin considers everything related to Russian nationalism as a potential rival for legitimacy, and therefore as something it should bring "under control." This "control" does not mean repression and coercion – far from it. On the contrary, it means giving a movement space for expression, allowing it to satisfy the needs of some segments of the population and to defuse the possibility of creating a coalition of the unsatisfied. But while the White Power movement was progressively weakened, a new wave of nationalist critiques of the regime emerged, this time more connected to the liberals.

Notes

1 Likhachev and Pribylovskii, eds., *Russkoe Natsional'noe Edinstvo*.
2 To gain legal status, an organization needs to register with the Ministry of Justice by presenting a more or less exhaustive set of documents (statutes, goals, taxation, membership rolls). The harshness of the conditions for registering permits those in power to limit the number of legally-recognized organizations and, therefore, those that have rights that must be respected.

3 Alexander Verkhovskii and Vladimir Pribylovskii, *Natsional-patrioticheskie organizatsii v Rossii* (Moscow: Panorama, 1996), 36–39.
4 Viacheslav Likhachev, *Natsizm v Rossii* (Moscow: Panorama, 2002), 142–143.
5 Alexander Verkhovskii, Anatolii Papp, and Vladimir Pribylovskii, *Politicheskii ekstremizm v Rossii* (Moscow: Panorama, 1996), 241.
6 Thomas Parland, "Russia in the 1990s: Manifestations of a Conservative Backlash Philosophy," in *The Fall of an Empire, the Birth of a Nation: National Identities in Russia*, eds. Chris J. Chulos and Timo Piirainen (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2000), 116–140.
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9 Shenfield, *Russian Fascism*, 121.
10 Sven Gunnar Simonsen, "Politics and Personalities: Key Actors in the Russian Opposition," PRIO Report, Oslo, 1996, 38.
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13 William D. Jackson, "Fascism, Vigilantism, and the State: The Russian National Unity Movement," *Problems of Post-Communism* 46, no. 1 (1999): 34–42.
14 Aleksandr Verkhovskii, Ekaterina Mikhailovskaia, and Vladimir Pribylovskii, *Politicheskaia ksenofobiia*: *Radikal'nye gruppy, predstavleniia liderov, rol' tserkvi* (Moscow: Panorama, 1999), 50–59.
15 Shenfield, *Russian Fascism*, 173.
16 Mikhail Zherebyatev, "Russian National Unity: A Political Challenge for Provincial Russia," *Prism* 5, no. 6 (1999), https://jamestown.org/program/russian-national-unity-a-political-challenge-for-provincial-russia/.
17 Verkhovskii and Kozhevnikova, eds., *Radikal'nyi russkii natsionalizm.*
18 Shenfield, *Russian Fascism*, 190. See also Vladimir Pribylovskii, "Nezametnyi raskol," *Russkaia mysl'* 4229 (1998): 9.
19 Andrei Rogachevski, *A Biographical and Critical Study of Russian Writer Eduard Limonov* (Lewiston, NY: Studies in Slavic Languages and Literatures no. 20, 2003).
20 Markus Mathyl, "Nationalisme et contre-culture jeune dans la Russie de l'après-perestroïka," in *Le rouge et le noir: Extrême-droite et nationalisme en Russie*, ed. Marlene Laruelle (Paris: CRNS-Éditions, 2007).
21 See a legal critique of this ban by Aleksandr Verkhovskii, "Pochemu sleduet otmenit' reshenie o zaprete NBP," August 4, 2007, http://xeno.sova-center.ru/29481C8/ 99C0ACC.
22 Robert Horvath, " 'Sakharov Would Have Been With Us': Limonov, Strategy-31, and the Dissident Legacy," *Russian Review* 74 (2015): 581–598.
23 Alexandra Kuznetsova and Serfey Sergeev, "Revolutionary Nationalism in Contemporary Russia," in *Russia before and after Crimea. Nationalism and Identity 2010–17*, eds. Pål Kolstø and Helge Blakkisrud (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 119–141.
24 In spring 1997, Eduard Limonov initially supported the Cossack groups of Kokchetau who were trying to proclaim North Kazakhstan's autonomy, then seems to have played an ambiguous role in the attempted separatist *coup d'état* that took place in 1999 in the Kazakhstani Altay. C.f. Marlene Laruelle and Sebastien Peyrouse, *Les Russes du Kazakhstan. Identités nationales et nouveaux États dans l'espace post-soviétique* (Paris, Maisonneuve & Larose: Institut français d'études sur l'Asie centrale, 2004), 227–229.
25 Quoted by Shenfield, *Russian Fascism*, 209.

26 Likhachev, *Natsizm v Rossii*, 66.
27 Fedor Pavlov-Andreevich, "La vie de nuit," *Kommersant*, December 10, 1994, www.kommersant.ru/doc/97429.
28 "Fashizm ili ne fashizm: konkurs," *Limonka* 11 (April 1995).
29 Rogachevski, *A Biographical and Critical Study.*
30 Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies Vol. 2*: *Male Bodies: Psychoanalyzing the White Terror* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999). On more contemporary aspects, see also Daniel Penny, "#Milosexual and the Aesthetics of Fascism," *Boston Review*, January 24, 2017, http://bostonreview.net/politics-gender-sexuality/daniel-penny-milosexual-and-aesthetics-fascism.
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32 Aleksandr Tarasov, *Natsi-skiny v sovremennoi Rossii* (Moscow: Moskovskoe biuro po pravam cheloveka, 2004).
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34 See Ivan Gololobov, Hilary Pilkington and Yngvar B. Steinhol, *Punk in Russia: Cultural Mutation from the "Useless" to the "Moronic"* (London: Routledge, 2016).
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41 David Duke, "Is Russia the Key to White Survival?," DavidDuke.com, October 23, 2004, http://davidduke.com/is-russia-the-key-to-white-survival/.
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44 The party's website has been banned since 2016. On Demushkin, read Aleksandr Verkhovskii, Galina Kozhevnikova, and Anton Shekhovtsov, eds, *Radikal'nyi russkii natsionalizm: struktury, idei, litsa* (Moscow: SOVA-Center, 2009).
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46 Mikhail M. Sokolov, "Samopredstavlenie organizatsii v russkom radikal'nom natsionalisticheskom dvizhenii" (PhD diss., Saint Petersburg State University, 2003), 22.
47 Shnirel'man, *"Chistil'shchiki moskovskikh ulits,"* 16.
48 Alexander Tarasov, "Meniaiushchiesia skinkhedy. Opyt nabluzhdeniia za subkul'turoi," *Druzhba narodov* 11 (2006).
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57 Robert Horvath, "*Russkii Obraz* and the politics of 'managed nationalism,'" *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity* 42, no. 3 (2014): 469–488.
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59 Tipaldou, "The Extreme Right Fringe."
60 Aleksandr Verkhovskii and Vera Al'perovich, *"Mysli't sprava." Kratkii obzor sovremenoi pravoradikal'noi ideologii* (Moscow: SOVA Center, 2011), www.sova-center.ru/racism-xenophobia/publications/2011/10/d22894/.
61 Mitrokhin, "Ot Pamiati k skinkhedam Luzhkova."
62 Vladimir Mukomel' and Emil Pain, eds., *Tolerantnost' protiv ksenofobii*. *Zarubezhnyi i rossiiskii opyt* (Moscow: Academia, 2005), 151. See also "Militsiia liubit nasilie," *Gazeta.ru*, February 15, 2006, www.gazeta.ru/2006/02/15/oa_188849.shtml.
63 All the data provided in this chapter was collected by SOVA-Center at the author's request. I express my gratitude to Alexander Verkhovky and Natalia Yudina.
64 The other organizations forbidden on the grounds of extremism often hold Islamic convictions.
65 SOVA Center considers that about one-quarter to one-third of these accusations are not justified.
66 Tarasov, *Natsi-skiny v sovremennoi Rossii.*
67 Shnirel'man, *"Chistil'shchiki moskovskikh ulits,"* 29.
68 Alexander Verkhovskii, "Dinamika nasiliia v russkom natsionalizme," in *Rossiia – Ne Ukraina: sovremennye aktsenty natsionalizma* (Moscow: SOVA Center, 2014), 37–38.
69 Yet this drop should be interpreted with caution. Such incidents are still underreported, especially when violence is perpetrated against migrants, who typically do not want to draw police attention. Additionally, many acts of racist violence are still often classified as hooliganism.
70 Alexander Verkhovsky, "The Russian Nationalist Movement at Low Ebb," in *Russia before and after Crimea. Nationalism and Identity 2010–17*, eds. Pål Kolstø and Helge Blakkisrud (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 142–162, here 143.
71 Levada Center, *Obshchestvennoe mnenie-2016* (Moscow: Levada Center, 2017), 186–190, 224, 229, 234. It was visible immediately during the first months of the war with Ukraine: M. Romanov and V. Stepanova, *Natsional'nyi vopros v Rossiiv kontekste ukrainskogo krizisa* (Moscow: Obshechstvennaia Palata, 2014), www.sova-center.ru/files/xeno/politeh-june14.pdf.
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8 Aleksei Navalny and the *Natsdem*

A pro-Western nationalism?[1]

In a few short years, civic activist, jurist, and blogger Aleksei Navalny (1976) has emerged as the major political opponent to President Putin. Almost unknown in 2011, he became the main figure embodying the 2011–2012 protests, with a slogan that denounced United Russia as a "party of crooks and thieves." Russia's most popular blogger in 2013, he reached one million followers on his Twitter account in 2015, and 57 percent of the population was aware of him on the eve of the 2018 presidential elections.[2] Navalny has never been formally registered to participate in an election, with the exception (after multiple twists and turns and several legal proceedings) of the September 2013 Moscow mayoral race, when he secured 27 percent of the vote to come in second behind incumbent mayor Sergei Sobianin – a success in the Russian political context. Since then, Navalny has focused on denouncing the corrupt schemes of current elites, and has faced regular arrests, stints in jail or house arrest, and extensive red tape.

Navalny represents one of Russia's *Zeitgeists* that is little known in the West: the National Democrats (*Natsdem*), combining pro-Western liberal narratives with ethnic nationalism and virulent xenophobia. This trend speaks to a segment of the Russian public opinion, especially the urban middle classes who prospered during the 2000s, but it faced setbacks as a result of the Ukrainian crisis. This *Natsdem* trend represents only the tip of the iceberg: more broadly, the imperial/Eurasianist brand of nationalist narrative has been on the decline, with the rise of a new wave of nationalists that advance a more pragmatic and ethnocentric agenda for Russia.[3] This new generation is not necessarily linked to the *Natsdem* – in opposition to the regime – and can be much more official, such as for instance Mikhail Remizov (1978), President of the Institute of National Strategy.

The sudden emergence of nationalist references among the liberal opponents to Putin has caused confusion among Western pundits. The interpretations put forward have tended to follow a politically correct, black-and-white way of thinking. They have questioned, for instance, whether ultranationalists could "subvert" pro-democracy protests,[4] whether it was an opportunistic strategy for the "bad guys" to become respectable nationalists, or whether the warm welcome that some liberals had reserved for nationalists was part of a political "calculus." This schema naively implies that democracy cannot be nationalist, and that liberalism cannot suddenly become "ill thought." The *Natsdem* movement

challenges these conventional, simplistic frameworks: nationalism and democracy have advanced in tandem in European history, and nationalism has no predetermined political orientation, merging easily with the politics of both the left and the right. The contemporary success of xenophobic populist parties in the European Union's member states should help challenge the idea that the *Natsdems*' ideological combination is weird or abnormal.

Whereas the *Natsdem* movement has mostly been studied in terms of its political significance for anti-Putin movements,[5] this chapter instead focuses on the successes and failures of the *Natsdems* in general – and Navalny in particular – in reconciling "nationalism" with "liberalism." Navalny can only disappoint those who expect from him a modicum of theoretical construction: he is a doer, not a thinker. His goals are eminently political: the broader his support, the better. As Natalia Moen-Larsen showed, on his LiveJournal, Navalny devoted only 15 percent of blog posts between 2006 and 2012 to nationalism issues, confirming that the topic occupies a relatively modest place in his activity – significantly less than denouncing the regime's corrupt schemes, for instance.[6] Yet it is precisely this ability to make nationalism part of a larger political agenda and to present it with rhetorical simplicity – far from the complex theoretical constructions of usual nationalist doctrinaires – that makes Navalny a legitimate representative of a "banal nationalism" in today's Russia.

The kaleidoscope of the *Natsdem* movement

The *Natsdems* are not a unified movement but a kaleidoscope of individuals with their own set of diverging ideological convictions, a loose coalition of a new generation of pro-Western nationalists. Some, like Vladimir Milov, define themselves as *Natslib* (national-liberals), others as *Natsdem*. Even among that last group the array of opinions is wide: it includes Konstantin Krylov, probably the most significant figure, who combines intellectual production and political action; Valerii Solovei (1960), a professor at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO) and author of the well-known *Blood and Soil of Russian History* (*Krov' i pochva russkoi istorii*);[7] Aleksei Shiropaev; and Aleksandr Sevast'ianov. In 1996, the latter, then famous for vocally condemning the repatriation of art confiscated by the Red Army in 1945 to Germany, coined the term "national democracy," defined by the idea that democracy should be limited to the titular ethnic group and does not apply to minorities.[8] But his belief in biological racism, references to Nazi Germany, and support for racist crimes[9] make him a controversial figure among some of the *Natsdem-Natslib* who share more liberal views.

Nor does the *Natsdem* movement have a unified institutional umbrella. Several small nationalist organizations, such as the Russian Civic Movement of Konstantin Krylov, the Russian Civic Union (*Russkii grazhdanskii soiuz*) of Anton Susov, and the DPNI, tried to launch a National Democratic Party (*Natsional'naia demokraticheskaia partiia*) in March 2012 but it was refused registration by the Ministry of Justice.[10] Another briefly registered party,

Vladimir Milov's Democratic Choice, also belonged to the broad *Natsdem* coalition.

Precursors to the Natsdem *movement*

In its formulation of a strong anti-Putin nationalism, the *Natsdem* movement drew inspiration from two earlier trends that illustrated the evolution of the nationalist landscape: the anti-Putin strategy of the *Limonovtsy* and the DPNI's calls for European populism. *Natsdems* are therefore unique not in their anti-Putinism, which many nationalist groups share, or in their perception of the conservative West as a model, but in insisting on liberal Europe as a path to follow. The *Limonovtsy* never endorsed a liberal or democratic nationalism; both adjectives are antithetical to their political conceptions. However, they were the first, within the nationalist camp, to give prevalence to tactics over ideology and to consider that the fight against Putinism necessitated an alliance with the liberals and democrats – they initiated their first demonstrations with them long before the 2011–2012 protest wave.

At the other end of the nationalist spectrum was Aleksandr Belov, the DPNI leader, who had stated loudly and clearly that there was no future for nationalism in Russia without its Europeanization. He thus exemplifies a growing part of the Russian far right that seeks to ally with Europe and the United States in the name of defending the "white world" in its civilizational war against "peoples of color."[11] Under his leadership, the Russian Marches became more politicized, taking on an increasingly anti-Putin tone. The first political slogans, mainly directed against the security services and in favor of releasing prisoners of conscience, emerged in 2007. But the real turning point came in 2010, when the March Steering Committee released more structured slogans against the regime and appeals for bottom-up changes emerged: "Putin, Leave"; "End the Power of the KGB"; "Down with Sovereign Democracy"; "Down with the Police State"; and "Freedom to Political Prisoners."[12] The political character of these appeals is not surprising, given that many nationalists and the *Limonovtsy* had had their brothers-in-arms jailed and convicted. The Russian March has thus contributed, even if indirectly, to formulating and mobilizing a distinctly anti-Putin atmosphere.

The *Natsdems* emerged as a product of these evolutions. They claim Russia's right to become a nation-state and follow the European model of development. But this claim contains tensions: on the one hand, it calls for a democratic Russia that would guarantee civic rights and respect for international law, while, on the other, it upholds the right of the divided Russian nation to "reunite," thus legitimating interference in Russia's "near abroad" in defense of co-ethnics. The annexation of Crimea epitomized the tensions within the movement, revealing an irresolvable contradiction between Russia having to act in defense of its ethnic interests and respect for legal obligations. As analyzed by Pål Kolstø,[13] the *Natsdem* movement burst ideologically in 2014: Solovei saw Crimea's annexation as the natural and desired return of the Peninsula to its motherland; Krylov insisted that Russia was right to defend Russians abroad but that annexing the region was illegitimate, and

then became more excited by Donbas than by Crimea; Milov stated that Russia should have honored its 1994 pledge to respect Ukrainian territory. As we can see from this diversity of positioning, one can separate out several strands within the nebulous *Natsdem* movement, some of which prioritize nationalism over legality and others of which do the opposite. Here, I will discuss three key figures of the movement, before moving on to Navalny himself.

Aleksei Shiropaev: Europe's democracy, federalism, and pagan identity

One revealing path for the crystallization of *Natsdem* within preexisting nationalist movements is that of Aleksei Shiropaev (1959). A restorer of art by training, Shiropaev has evolved from the classic position of defending a strong state (*gosudarstvennichestvo*), monarchism, and Orthodoxy, to a democratic, federal, and neo-pagan ideology. As head of the small National Democratic Alliance (*Natsional-demokraticheskii al'ians*), he has tried to make his voice heard above the *Natsdem* roar – for instance in forming the Russian Civic Union (*Russkii grazhdanskii soiuz*) with the DPNI – but with limited success. He belongs to an older generation whose modes of expression have little visibility on the Internet and social media and whose narratives are now out of step with the *Natsdem* young public.

For Shiropaev, Christian churches are subject to temporal powers, including the most autocratic and atheist ones, and have never positioned themselves in favor of democracy, hence his disavowal of them and his preference for neo-paganism. Similarly, the imperial and Soviet past is denounced as having turned Russia away from its European nature: "The solution to the Russian question implies an exit from the paradigm of imperial nation."[14] Shiropaev thus sees an ideological impasse in the majority of contemporary nationalist movements:

> The old Russian nationalism [is] a reactionary ideology, oriented on authoritarianism, a closed society, paternalistic, archaic and medieval moral values. It openly declares disdain for democracy, civil rights and dislike of 'persons of a certain nationality' […] The vector of the old Russian nationalism is the Eurasian, the Horde, the Imperial, the anti-Western. It is trying to gain support for the most odious regimes, be it Chechnya or Iran. It is objectively a pro-Putin political movement, which speculates on the most reactionary remnants and stereotypes of Russian society.[15]

To help Russia change, Shiropaev supports a new political contract based on an egalitarian and decentralized federalism, inspired by the German model. Each national republic would have a high degree of autonomy and the right to secede, and Shiropaev assumes that the secession of the North Caucasus republics would be likely. Several new Russian republics, in which ethnic Russians would have special status as titular people, would be created on the basis of territories that are not already a part of a national entity: the Russian republics of the North,

South, Central, Ural-Volga, Siberia, and Far East. Russia's new political system would be a parliamentary republic, inspired by Europe, that would contribute "to the development of liberal democracy and civil society."[16] A large decentralization would result in an end to Kremlin-backed oligarchic regimes and reduce state corruption. To bolster his proposal, Shiropaev relies on a powerful historical parallel: the medieval struggle between the principality of Novgorod (symbolic of a democratic, federal, and European Russia) and the principality of Moscow (centralized, authoritarian, and oriented toward Asia). *Natsdem* ideology would thus be inspired by the model of Novgorod's Russia.

Shiropaev's triple narrative – neo-pagan, federalist, and democratic – is not broadly subscribed to in Russia. Yet the notion that a centralizing and authoritarian Moscow has led Russia to its doom and that there is an invisible, decentralized, and democratic Russia present in its provinces is an old historical paradigm. Indeed, it has been present among liberals since the nineteenth century, prompting them to appeal for a return to Novgorod or for a democratic revival via Siberian autonomy.[17] More importantly, this triple narrative is the perfect match for the ideological patterns of the Western European far right since the 1960s – especially the Young Europe movement that gave birth to the major theoreticians of the New Right in France, Belgium, Italy, and Germany, which calls for a neo-pagan and federal Europe of ethnies.[18]

Konstantin Krylov: nationalism before democracy

Konstantin Krylov (1967) represents a second strand of the *Natsdem* movement and is its most productive intellectual. A prolific publicist and convert to Zoroastrianism, he was one of the pillars of *Russkii zhurnal* and *Spetnaz Rossii* before being named editor of the news agency APN. Since 2010, he has edited the journal *Voprosy natsionalizma*, which has become one of the most innovative platforms for nationalist discussions.[19] The journal has created a venue where contradictory positions can be expressed and demonstrated the ability of this new generation to produce high-quality theoretical discourse, which was sorely lacking from their predecessors in the 1990s and 2000s. It also has sought to build bridges between the "intellectuals" and "practitioners" of nationalism with the creation of what Vladimir Nishukov aptly named a "nationalist middle class"[20] interested in a popularizing but high-quality approach. Since 2005, Krylov has chaired the Russian Social Movement (*Russkoe obshchestvennoe dvizhenie*) and spearheaded nationalist participation in anti-Putin protests. Very visible on social media, in 2009 he was ranked as the fourth most influential intellectual in Russia, according to a survey of 40,000 people conducted by Openspace. Writer Viktor Pelevin came in first place, but Krylov beat out Patriarch Kirill as well as major nationalist names such as Dugin, Aleksandr Prokhanov, Natalia Narochnitskaia, Mikhail Leontev, and Sergei Kara-Murza.[21]

Krylov is a fervent supporter of ethnonationalism and has denounced the current government as foreign to the Russian nation (*inorodcheskii*).[22] He regularly refers to the colonial methods used by the Kremlin to run the country and

would like to see the birth of a Russian national liberation movement. He therefore interpreted the Donbas insurgency as a "Russian spring" heralding a national revolution that would overthrow the Kremlin.[23] For Krylov, nationalism and democracy go hand-in-hand because both are based on the supremacy of the masses: democracy respects the political choices of the majority and nationalism expresses the sentiments of this same majority. If the authorities would listen to the opinion of the 80 percent of citizens who are ethnic Russians, he states, then the country would automatically become both democratic and national.[24] This link between nationalism and democracy was at the heart of the first edition of *Voprosy natsionalizma*, titled "The National and the Social." The reference was not to German National Socialism, but to the idea that ethnic Russians are an ethnic class (*etnoklass*) apart, victims of their own oligarchies as well as of cosmopolitan elites.

With this in mind, Krylov calls for a revival of Russians on behalf of their national identity as well as democratic values but remains largely silent on the concrete aspects of the latter. Deliberatively provocative, he asserts that the best democrats are former fascists because they have been immunized against the malady of authoritarianism. However, he seeks to dismiss the criticism that Russian nationalists may be inspired by the European fascist experience. For him, fascism is above all a tool for protest and the swastika a provocation to attract attention. His cautiousness in denouncing "non-democratic" nationalists indicates that the national question remains his ideological driver more than democracy/liberalism. Since 2014 his support for volunteer fighters in Donbas has aligned him with the more conservative and imperial movements, whatever his pro-Western stand has been.[25]

As for other *Natsdems*, the North Caucasus crystallizes Krylov's resentment and is perceived to be the embodiment of the country's illness. He criticizes the Caucasus, "which lives in resort conditions (*v kurortnykh usloviiakh*) and benefits from transfers from the state budget," as well as "the right of a Caucasian to kill a Russian and receive only a suspended sentence"[26] – denouncing ethnic Russians sent to prison for racist crimes became a critical slogan for all anti-Putin nationalist movements. Like a growing number of nationalists, Krylov advocates independence for the North Caucasus, or at least a kind of protectorate that would leave the region separated from the rest of the country.[27] Unlike Navalny, Krylov does not clearly associate the situation in the North Caucasus with the Putin regime and tends toward a primordial formulation of the sociopolitical issues he describes. He calls, for instance, for "a zero-tolerance policy towards people from the South [as] at the everyday level Caucasians have not only money, but extraordinary privileges, and feel as masters of the country."[28]

Vladimir Milov: Russia's liberalism should become Russian

Vladimir Milov (1972) personifies a third trend, closer to classic liberalism than to nationalism. He is also the *Natsdem* – he presents himself as *Natslib* – who has the most political experience. He worked for the Center for Strategic Assessment

under Minister of Economic Development and Trade German Gref (1964), and then was his counselor before briefly serving as deputy minister of energy in the government of Mikhail Kasyanov (1957). The director of the Institute for Energy Policy, he formerly led the Democratic Choice party, which presented itself as "center left" and was a part of the Solidarnost' opposition coalition between 2008 and 2010. He then rallied to Navalny, co-authoring the latter's political program for the 2018 presidential elections.

In many articles, interviews, and LiveJournal posts, Milov expresses his desire to rehabilitate nationalism in the worldviews of Russian liberals. He draws this conclusion from the failure of the first liberals of the 1990s: "The national component has been totally removed by the Russian liberal movement […], contributing in large part to the failure of the liberal project in Russia these last twenty years."[29] To support his argument, he consistently mentions the experience of the Central European and Baltic states, arguing that a combination of liberalism and nationalism should be credited with these countries' successful political, social, and economic transformations and their integration into Europe.[30] Milov is unambiguous in his definition of Russia's European identity: "It is time to return to the European home. We, Russians, are European, we must not be pushed toward Asia, Asia is foreign to us."[31] He therefore invites liberals to recapture the nationalist theme: "In history, Russian nationalists have often been Black Hundreds or partisans of a strong state (*chernosotentsy-derzhavniki*) […] but this story now belongs in the past."[32]

With these findings, Milov reaches out to nationalist movements in recognition that it is the theme of immigration that brings them together: "We and the nationalists share a common view on the solutions to these [immigration] problems."[33] He believes that radical nationalist groups touch on actual issues, but do so in a maladroit fashion: "Yes, there are fascists in Manezh Square. But nationalist slogans would never have been so popular if they did not address real problems."[34] He worries, for instance, about the uncontrollable number of migrants from the Caucasus and Central Asia and denounces Putin's refusal to introduce a visa system with Central Asia. As a solution, he proposes programs of "decriminalization of migrant groups and a war against ethnic criminal groups" and a stop to the "export [from the North Caucasus] of the culture of permissiveness, cult of force, and total corruption."[35] At the core of his *Natsdem* theory lies "a definition of Russian national identity in the political sense of the term"[36] that should seal the historical reconciliation between nationalism and liberalism – but, like Navalny, Milov did not advance any concrete elements for its construction.

Navalny's political trajectory

Unlike many other *Natsdem* figures with the exception of Milov, Navalny first committed to politics as a "liberal" well before being also labeled a "nationalist." He joined the Yabloko party in 2000 at the age of 24, and rapidly ascended to its upper echelons, through his management of Moscow's electoral campaign in the

nationwide parliamentary election in 2003, and then by becoming a member of the party's federal council.[37] But Yabloko's repeated failures in the legislative elections of 2003 and 2007 pushed him to search for new political orientations.

Navalny began to run under the "national-democrat" label in 2006–2007, apparently transformed and innervated by the Kondopoga interethnic riots.[38] The following year, he launched the "Russian National Liberation Movement" (*Natsional'noe Russkoe osvoboditel'noe dvizhenie*), whose Russian acronym, Narod, means "people." This initiative was sponsored by the PR specialist Stanislav Belkovskii, who was then seeking to wrest the monopoly on anti-Putin nationalist discourse from the hands of Eduard Limonov and his "Other Russia."[39] At this time, Navalny also began to follow the Russian March on November 4, then the only sizable nationalist gathering, and participated in its organizing committee. At least in part as a result of this engagement, he was expelled from Yabloko at the end of 2007 for "causing damage to the party, among other reasons for nationalist activities."[40] In the Narod videos, Navalny presented himself humoristically as "Aleksei Navalny, Professionally Certified Nationalist" (*diplomirovannyi natsionalist*).

After being dismissed from Yabloko, Navalny invested all his energy into developing anti-corruption campaigns that brought him notoriety (especially minority shareholder activism and court actions) and launched the RosPil project, which monitors corrupt practices in the government procurement process.[41] Created in 2006, his LiveJournal quickly became his "trademark" as the most followed blog on the Russian-language Internet. Since then, Navalny's place within the *Natsdem* trend has been questioned by some, who believe that nationalism constitutes only a minor part of his ideological portfolio and that his legal activism separates him from the rest of the movement. His nationalistic positions have led to many online debates, ranging from those in the West who do not want to detract from the myth of the perfect Western liberal, to some Russian liberals from the Ekspert media group who compare his success to that which brought Hitler to power, boosted by xenophobic middle classes tired of the previous regime.[42] Navalny's nationalist stance was heavily hyped by the Kremlin to smear and disqualify him: before the 2018 presidential elections, an anonymous video circulated on YouTube paralleling Hitler and Navalny,[43] and compiling some of the latter's real declarations – but often out of context – and several non-confirmed statements on his supposed anti-Semitism and calls for ethnic cleansing.[44]

A look at Navalny's political strategies highlights some of his nationalist ambiguities: although he maintains contact with many sectors of civil society, he has never given any support to groups and NGOs that fight against racism and xenophobia, nor to "antifa" movements – anti-fascist youths, often marked by a leftist stance[45] – and he has never allied with the few groups or figures that defend migrants.

Insight can also be gained from looking at Navalny's positioning toward other nationalist leaders. He openly criticizes only those founded on imperialist rhetoric or nostalgia for the Soviet Union, in particular the Eurasianists, which he

denounces as being nothing more than "Soviet patriots." But he refrains from criticizing skinheads even when they commit unlawful racist crimes. He defended both Aleksandr Belov and Dmitrii Demushkin, who were accused of inciting racial hatred, and was troubled only by their enthusiasm for Chechnya as a role model for Russia upon their return from a meeting with Ramzan Kadyrov.[46] He has also claimed that the Russian March represents a positive development for nationalism that is "totally adequate and absolutely not dangerous."[47] Finally, Navalny made no secret of his support for Belov's DPNI, noting that the Swiss People's Party and the French National Front are much more radical, yet are recognized as legitimate actors in the Western European political space.[48] The fact that he sympathizes with the most radical and violent far-right groups calls into question his claim to be a "democrat."

Navalny's ideological inconsistencies on the national question

Herald of the anti-corruption struggle, Navalny also, paradoxically, appears as a pure product of the Putin system and mirrors the president on many aspects. He is a manifestation of a populist and personalistic culture, and a certain degree of ideological opportunism.[49] On several occasions, Navalny has been implored to explain his stance on nationalism and the way it articulates with his democratic position. This question has disquieted not only journalists (at Ekho Moskvy, Lenta, Dozhd' TV, and other outlets) but also famous writers such as Boris Akunin (1956) who, finding this combination unsettling, engaged in public correspondence with Navalny. Navalny professes: "I do not see any contradiction in being liberal and speaking at the same time about illegal immigration and ethnic criminality. There is no dilemma there for me, no evolution in my positions."[50] Indeed, there may well be no inherent theoretical contradiction. But Navalny has often made contradictory remarks on this reconciling of nationalism and liberalism. He sometimes purely and simply refuses to answer the questions of interviewers, or quickly becomes annoyed when journalists insist on having clear-cut and articulated assumptions. He is not interested in theoretical constructions and refuses to engage in debate over what can be identified as contradictory stances. Nevertheless, one can separate out three core arguments of his nationalist persuasions.

Russia as a "Russkii" national state

Many figures have asked Navalny how he can subscribe to what they see as two contradictory ideologies: democracy and nationalism. For him, however, there is no contradiction here, since both are part of the same stream: European nation-states were born in the nineteenth century out of the connection between the entry of the masses onto the political scene and the establishment of a national repertoire (e.g., language, significant historical events, and a pantheon of heroes), whereby an official line is drawn between those who do and do not belong to the nation. According to him, Russia now finds itself in a similar situation: the imperial/Soviet

past was autocratic/authoritarian and shedding it means re-associating the nation and democracy. This combination of nationalism and democracy underscores Russia's European identity: "A nationalist […] is a person oriented toward Europe. Russian nationalism is an ideology that is very close to the European mainstream, more so than one assumes."[51]

Based on that assumption, Navalny claims that Russia has the absolute need to develop a "normal" nationalism, meaning a nationalism that does not believe in the country's *Sonderweg* but, on the contrary, in its "normalcy" within the European nation-state framework. This new Russian state should be a national one (*russkoe natsional'noe gosudarstvo*). The use of the adjective *natsional'noe* implies that the country's federal structure should be abolished. Navalny sees in it only a legacy of the imperial past and an extension of Soviet administrative divisions designed to help keep local oligarchs in power. The use of the adjective *russkii* is more difficult to decipher. Navalny considers the notion of *rossiiskii* to be a "chimera"[52] inherited from the Yeltsin years; having two terms, *rossiiskii* and *russkii*, accelerates the denationalization of the country, and there should therefore be only one term used to define the nation, as is the case in many European countries.

Unlike the ethnonationalists of the 1990s, Navalny's usage of the term *russkii* is indecisive: it is supposed to have a civic, rather than exclusively ethnic, connotation. Because it is democratic, the new *russkii* identity would be compatible with the ethnic diversity of the country, offering the option of assimilation to those who desire it, as well as respect for cultural differences in the name not of federal principles, but of democratic ones. However, Navalny has failed to explain the context in which this civic *russkii* identity would emerge. The Narod manifesto reproduces, for instance, very classic statements common to all Russian nationalist movements and does not advance a new use of *russkii* to define a civic nation struggling against the Putin regime for democratic rights.

> The principal goal of the Russian state (*rossiiskii*) is to stop the processes of degradation of the Russian civilization (*russkii*), and to create the conditions for the preservation and development of the Russian people (*russkii*), its culture, its language, its historical territory.[53]

Moreover, Navalny shares a vision of an Eastern Slavic unity that goes against his civic posture: if *russkii* is a civic term encompassing all citizens of the Russian state, then ethnic solidarity with neighboring states cannot be stressed. Like many ethnonationalists, Navalny is strenuously opposed to any imperial expansion – in which he sees the strategy of "an elite that steals from the population under the banner of conquering half the world"[54] – but remains much more ambiguous about Russia's relationship to Ukraine and Belarus, part of an Eastern Slavic brotherhood.

On Ukrainian television in 2012, the blogger for instance stated that the Russian, Belarusian, and Ukrainian peoples were one: "I'm deeply convinced that Ukraine and Belarus are the most important geopolitical allies of Russia.

Our foreign policy should be maximally directed at integration with Ukraine and Belarus […] In fact, we're one nation. We should enhance the integration."[55] In the face of fierce reactions from the audience, Navalny had to retract his comments, defining Ukraine as a "sister nation." In addition, while he wants to spearhead criticism of any kind of authoritarian regime in Russian history, he has been incapable of denouncing Tsarist or Soviet violence against Ukrainian cultural autonomy, which puts him in the classic position of the *gosudarstvennik*, who defends the Russian state's decisions no matter what.

Navalny's position on Crimea, too, reveals his ambivalence. He immediately criticized the annexation and never stopped stating that the referendum was a fake one and that it was unacceptable to support the changing of borders by military force. Nonetheless, he has difficulties accepting Crimea as part of Ukraine:

> Is it right that Crimea belongs to Ukraine? Of course not. The point that Crimea was given to Ukraine by chance is unreasonable and insulting for every normal citizen of the Russian Federation. It was illegally removed by a voluntary decision of the despot Khrushchev. Thus, the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union) and all the idiots of the Politburo are responsible for this.[56]

He then progressively stopped saying he would return Crimea to Ukraine if he were to become president, shifting toward more ambivalent positions. When asked for more details about his position, he declared that he would propose a genuine referendum to make the annexation a posteriori legal, but that Kyiv would probably never recognize it.[57] Interviewed by Aleksei Venediktov, chief editor of Ekho Moskvy, he said, "I think that despite the fact that Crimea was seized with egregious violations of all international regulations, the reality is that Crimea is now part of Russia."[58] Nor did he hesitate to state that the issue of immigration is "a hundred times" more important than Ukraine. Only on the Donbas issue does Navalny take a straightforward line going against many of the other nationalist figures, asserting that the war is costing Russia too much, is killing too many local people, and should be stopped as rapidly as possible by implementing the two Minsk agreements.[59]

A similar paradox can be found in Navalny's position on the issue of religion. A defender of the separation of Church and State who condemns any discrimination against other religions or atheists, he nonetheless asserts that "the religion of Russia is Orthodox Christianity."[60] These words further blur his message. By failing to clearly separate the cultural symbols used by the Church and the legal status of the different confessions, Navalny remains opaque on his political stance. He has, for instance, never questioned the Moscow Patriarchate's current strategy of penetrating public institutions such as schools and the military, even though it presents a direct challenge to the separation of Church and State.

The North Caucasians as "foreign" to Russia

Like other *Natsdems*, Navalny sees the North Caucasus as a central problem for Russia. In spring 2011, he co-launched the successful media campaign "Stop Feeding the Caucasus" (*Khvatit kormit' Kavkaz*), which contends that the autocratic and corrupt regimes of the North Caucasus – and especially that of Ramzan Kadyrov in Chechnya – are archetypal of the Putin system.[61] The two are mutually dependent: the disappearance of the Putin system would provoke the collapse of the North Caucasian regimes, while the fight against them would inflict a direct blow on Putin because non-democracy in Russia is the fruit of the poor management of the North Caucasian conflict since 1994.[62]

To support his statement, Navalny advances several arguments. The first refers to the outlaw nature of the Chechen regime, in particular the supra-powers that the Kremlin has de facto granted to Kadyrov, which allow him to operate outside the Russian legal system as a personal servant of Putin. The second relates to budget subsidies. The North Caucasus Federal District receives some of the highest levels of subsidies in the country, especially compared to what it contributes to the budget. Navalny has launched his own investigations into government spending, proposing full civil society control over the expenditure of public funds in the North Caucasian republics.[63]

However, when journalists question him about Chechnya's future, Navalny struggles to take a definite stance. He asserted, for instance, that the republic is no longer a de facto part of Russia, because Russian law no longer applies there, but he refuses to support its secession.[64] He constantly hesitates between identifying the North Caucasus as a political problem or framing North Caucasians as alien to Russian culture and civilizationally backward. Even as he tries to link the North Caucasian situation to the fundamental malpractices of the Putin regime, his remarks regularly imply that the region is "culturally foreign" to Russia. He has proposed banning the Lezginka (the Chechen national dance) and has more than once referred to the Chechens as an archaic nation, still shaped by the blood feud mentality. In 2007, when Narod sought to draw closer to the DPNI, then at its peak, Navalny made a video clip supporting the legalization of firearms – a key DPNI demand – that conflated "Islamic terrorism" with "Caucasians," whom he described as "vermin" and "cockroaches" that ought to be eradicated with firearms.[65] This is not the only time that Navalny's intentionally provocative remarks have played the racist humor card.

In many of his interviews since becoming more of a media figure, Navalny has tried to normalize his standpoint, yet he still maintains fundamental ambiguities. He proclaims, for instance, the need to shield Russian territory from Caucasian "problems," but does not elaborate on what this would mean. Moreover, he has called for amnesty for the federal forces that committed violence during the wars in Chechnya,[66] which seems to imply that violence carried out by the Russian state against North Caucasians is excusable. This amnesty claim has been common to nationalist movements since the first war of 1994–1996 but

contradicts the liberal position of denouncing every illegal act committed by the Putin regime, and especially by its security services. It is only on questions of internal migration of North Caucasians, and in particular of Dagestanis, to other regions of Russia that Navalny seems to often – though not systematically – distinguish himself from other nationalist voices, insofar as he considers that all Russian citizens have the right to move freely within the country. In his 2018 campaign, he introduced some nuances to his anti-Chechen posture by recognizing that regular unfair arrests and trials by Russian federal forces may contribute to Islamic radicalization.[67]

An assumed anti-migrant policy

Similar inaccuracies are found in Navalny's stance on the migration issue. He does not favor any rapprochement with Central Asia (the South Caucasus is rarely mentioned); on the contrary, he calls for the introduction of a visa regime with it. He even drew a parallel with the construction of a wall at the US–Mexico border (before this became part of Trump's program), declaring that the United States had more courage to defend its national interests than Russia did.[68] When asked about the Russian economy's need for labor, Navalny is not able to give a clear answer and moves quickly to the supposed role of Central Asian migrants in the development of drug trafficking in Russia.[69] However, during his interview by Aleksei Venediktov on Ekho Moskvy, he was pushed to acknowledge that his statements on migrant criminality (that Central Asian and South Caucasian migrants were responsible for 50 percent of all crimes committed in Moscow) were based on false data.[70]

Similarly, he remains blurry about the conditions for and degree of migrant integration: he pledges, "I am for assimilation, not deportation. If you want to live here, then become a Russian […] Arriving in the US, the majority of people become American."[71] However, during his interview on Ekho Moskvy, he came out against mass naturalization of migrants, and thus showed himself to be far from the American or Canadian model that he seemed to endorse. He states that "those who come to our country but do not wish to respect our laws and our traditions must be expelled,"[72] but remains imprecise on what respecting the law means when the law-enforcement agencies themselves are known for their endemic corruption, as well as on how "national traditions" can be defined. As previously mentioned, Navalny has failed to defend migrants facing the arbitrary nature of law-enforcement agencies.

His vision on migration became more elaborate in 2013 with his entry into the Moscow mayoral campaign. In his electoral platform, he emphasized the role of "corrupt officials" who put migrants "in situations of slavery" and discussed measures for forcing businesses to hire legal migrants. He also mentioned an integration program for migrants founded on learning the Russian language and education for children.[73] He proposed a more systematic policy to combat illegal immigration (the introduction of a visa system), but did not formulate a position on legal immigration (he never comments on the Russian economy's need for

migrants or the country's demographic issue) nor on the citizenship question (how migrants become citizens).

Leonid Volkov, Navalny's right-hand man in the Moscow mayoral race, was more specific, recognizing that several unrelated issues have accumulated in the minds of the public and that they must be separated into at least four categories, each of which warrants its own response: (1) "Uzbeks and Tajiks" and the labor-market competition they pose for increasingly skilled positions; (2) the North Caucasus, which is not a migration problem but a political one; (3) "Azeris on the markets"; and finally (4) "relations with Muslims" in general.[74] Volkov promised a specific response to each of these questions during the campaign, but Navalny's platform has remained one of generalities. The way Volkov typologized these four issues did not herald a comprehensive assessment of Russia's migration policy, instead pursuing a primordialist narrative about the specific tensions allegedly created by each ethnic group.

Navalny's ambivalence on the migration issue resurfaced in October 2013, during the riots in Biryulevo. The blogger re-tweeted several nationalist statements[75] and offered his own sympathetic explanation of popular despondence: "One of the expected consequences of such a concentration of migrants [in Biryulevo] is that 50 percent of the children in neighboring schools do not speak Russian. You understand yourselves that this does not arouse enthusiasm among locals (*korennye*)."[76] Navalny was thus entirely in tune with the mainstream narrative, disparaging both the concentration of migrants in ghettos and their lack of integration, and wields the vocabulary advanced by ultranationalists in speaking of Russians as "locals" or "indigenous." Hence, he offers no alternative reading by which it would be possible to effectively target the malfunctioning of the Russian bureaucratic system that fuels the violent interactions between "migrants" and "locals."

His views on migration policy likewise remain vague. He talks of "reducing the number of migrants, introducing a visa regime which only allows highly skilled migrants in, and increasing work productivity."[77] But he does not advance any economic strategy that would allow the country to forgo immigration – only the very fuzzy terminology of "work productivity" seems to suggest a revalorization of unskilled jobs with a view to attracting Russian citizens. He also calls for a visa system uniquely designed for Central Asia and the South Caucasus, but not for Ukraine and Moldova, implying that Russia's immigration problem is cultural or "civilizational" rather than legal or economic.[78]

Since 2015, Navalny has been exploiting the many terrorist acts in the West to strengthen the association of migrants with terrorism and radical Islam. In 2015, for instance, he stated that "90 percent of immigrants in Russia are young Muslim men from rural regions, i.e., the same environment in which terrorists are raised"[79] – not only is the logical shortcut radical, but the statistics are wrong. While his 2018 presidential political program was empty of any concrete measures, his short videos continue to offer insight into his convictions: commenting on a migrant protest that turned violent, he declared for instance that the next generation of Russia-born children of migrants would "consider themselves to

have even more rights" and would "conduct themselves even more savagely."[80] Old habits die hard.

Articulating "nationalism," "democracy," and "liberalism"

The terminological ambiguities used to describe the ideological niche occupied by Navalny and the *Natsdem* movement obscure, rather than clarify, the debate. During the Soviet era, some dissidents combined calls for a more democratic Russia with nationalist claims, but this was a virtually nonexistent ideological blend in the 1990s. At that time, the liberals were reluctant to address the national identity question; they saw it as a heavy legacy of the Soviet regime on which it was better not to dwell, and instead adhered to a Yeltsin-era discourse of the Russian civic nation (*rossiiskii*), framed among others by Valerii Tishkov (1941), director of the Miklukho-Maklay Institute for Ethnology and Anthropology.[81] Within this discourse, debates on ethnic identity were considered the domain of backward-looking political groups, whether Communist or nationalist, or were reserved for discussing the status of republics within the Federation.

The situation changed fundamentally in the 2000s, by which time the liberals of the Yeltsin era had disappeared from the political scene. If a majority of Yabloko voters continue to consider that nationalism is unacceptable, many of the anti-Putin opposition figures of recent years have neither taken a clear anti-nationalist stance nor condemned the support they have received from right-wing movements. A leading example in this regard is Garry Kasparov, who has never concealed his sympathy for some nationalist slogans, was allied with Eduard Limonov for several years, and has come out in defense of the conspiracy theories of alternate historian Anatolii Fomenko. As stated by Alexander Verkhovsky:

> The opposition has no selection criteria: if someone is in favor of free and fair elections and democracy (in whatever form – no one goes into the details), and against Putin, there are no grounds for throwing them out, since these three points make up the entire opposition agenda.[82]

Obviously, liberals view some historical references – like the Black Hundreds and Stalin's "great Russian chauvinism," with its anti-Semitic policies – very negatively. But for the majority of liberals, just as for their fellow citizens, a profession of faith in patriotism and, most importantly, an anti-migrant and anti-North Caucasian attitude do not fall into the category of "nationalism."

The economist Mikhail Delyagin, known for his social-democratic positions and now rallied behind the Izborskii Club (see Chapter 6), for instance, attempted to create a nationalist-populist party, "Motherland–Common Sense" (*Rodina–zdravyi smysl*) with Maksim Kalashnikov, a radical publicist who claims a national socialist ideology.[83] Even in a bastion of liberal thought like radio station Ekho Moskvy, some journalists – including Iuliia Latynina (1966), who was in 2008 awarded the American Freedom Defenders Award – have

published very strong arguments against what they see as "the de-Russification of Russia."[84] Oligarch Mikhail Prokhorov (1965), who ran against Putin in the 2012 presidential election, was unambiguous about the need to introduce a visa system for nationals of Central Asian countries. Within the opposition movement Democratic Choice, Kirill Rodionov (1987), a Research Fellow at the Gaidar Institute for Economic Policy who has published in *Forbes Russia*, *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, and *Vedomosti*, is not alone in professing that Russia is "self-liquidating" by accepting too many migrants, since they threaten its national and European identity.[85] In that discursive respect, Navalny offers nothing new and represents a mainstream.

Outside observers as well as the *Natsdem* themselves seem to use the terms "national-democrats" and "national-liberals" interchangeably. But this indiscriminate use of *democrat* and *liberal*, common for many years, creates more problems than it solves, as the two terms do not overlap. Democracy is a form of government in which citizens participate equally, which recognizes the majority opinion as its functioning principle, the need for public participation, and alternation in power between different political forces as a normal process. Liberalism is not a form of government, but a political philosophy that presupposes that individuals have their own rights (political, economic, societal, etc.) that may contradict collective identities. Democracy can therefore be illiberal.

Navalny exemplifies this combination: his stance and actions may be labeled democratic, but not liberal. He believes in democracy as a form of government – even if many of his close associates have denounced his authoritarianism, and journalists his contempt for both their profession and the idea that media represents the fourth estate. But his liberal convictions are less easy to capture. He himself regularly uses the term "liberals" in a very disdainful manner, here too as the Putinian mainstream does.[86] Navalny may be a "liberal" when he addresses the right to free elections and the government's accountability to society, but he is not when he talks about tolerance, equality, or inclusion.

Like the *Natsdem* movement as a whole, Navalny consider that *demos* – the citizenry – should also be *ethnos* – the primordial group. Only ethnic Russians constitute both an *ethnos* and a *demos*, and therefore their individual rights should be protected from state abuses. Other ethnicities ("Caucasians," "migrants") have only an *ethnos* but no right to the *demos*, and therefore state violence against them is justified or at least tolerated. Hence the almost total absence, in Navalny's discursive range, of the violated rights of the Russian *citizens* of the North Caucasian republics or those of *individuals* in work migration – they do not exist as individuals, only as a group.

Navalny embodies a new ideological combination trying to merge the traditional binary – civic versus ethnic – nationalism: ethnic Russians should display ethnic nationalism toward other groups but civic nationalism for themselves. Like other ethnonationalists, Navalny opposes ethnic minorities and Islam, calls for a visa regime with Central Asia, and denies any imperial destiny for Russia. Even if he sees Ukraine and Belarus as part of an Eastern Slavic brotherhood, and symbolically part of the same nation, he respects Russia's borders and does

not support any annexation policy. He accepted the annexation of Crimea once a *fait accompli*, but remains opposed to the Donbas insurgency. He thus offers a form of pragmatic ethnonationalism that does believe Russia has a mission to defend its ethnic identity at home, but not its co-ethnics abroad.

His ideological ambivalence does not necessarily hamper political actions – on the contrary. Navalny is not a theorist, and does not claim to be one. His ability to organize various principles into a logical whole is weak; his arguments are often inconsistent and poorly articulated. But this is not a problem for political action. Public opinion is not searching for theories, and Navalny's comments on the North Caucasus and migrants do not need theoretical sophistication in order to garner popular support. He remains, above all, oriented toward political action, and wants to mobilize the largest number of people: his ideological malleability and simplicity are not a curse but a blessing for his potential political success.

* * *

Russian society has become increasingly socially diverse and stratified according to geography, generation, and access to consumer goods, foreign countries, and cultural products. In this context, the birth of the *Natsdem* – simultaneously pro-European, democratic, and xenophobic – responded to a fundamental shift in Russian society. In stating that Russia should follow a European model, the *Natsdem* have the potential to contribute to a genuine political debate over the country's future. They encapsulate a new mindset that refuses to pursue imperial dreams, seen as destructive of Russia, and favor a more pragmatic ethnonationalism that focuses on Russians' own well-being at home.

Despite their ideological innovations, *Natsdem* have thus far failed to offer plausible solutions to the issues they flag. Their call for a unitary Russian national state, rather than a federation, seems to be an unrealistic project with no attraction for the 20 percent of the population that is not ethnically Russian. On the immigration issue, they are likewise unable to provide a structured policy with realistic outcomes: introducing a visa regime with Central Asia and the South Caucasus would not regulate the long-term interactions between a Russian economy that lacks a sufficient workforce and the neighboring countries whose people are looking for jobs. Although the *Natsdems* argue that the overthrow of the Putin regime will drive structural change in the country, they have not articulated how a parliamentary republic and a democratic system would regulate the "interethnic" relations that they continue to understand in an essentialist way.

Natsdems can point to one critical success, that of reintegrating the national theme into political debates, especially among a new generation of liberals. As the European Union countries are currently rediscovering, the social contract cannot be shaped without including the topic of "belonging" to the nation. There will not be a civic identity in Russia without *also* discussing the defining line between those who belong and the others (migrants), without defining which intermediary bodies are legally recognized and which are not (ethnic groups),

and without a broad consensus on the cultural framework that allows society to operate on a daily basis (the use of a common language and a minimum set of shared cultural and historical references).

However, to this point, and despite their declarations of intent, the *Natsdems* have failed to offer a concept of civic belonging to the nation that does not reproduce the classic clichés of Russian nationalism. They do not know how to articulate a liberalism that is founded on individual rights and a nationalism that believes in essentialized collective identities. They continue to assert their solidarity with extreme right-wing movements that deny the legitimacy of democracy and defend unlawful violence if committed by ethnic Russians against non-ethnic Russians. Navalny himself has showed ideological opportunism, playing with contradictions and using a populist, simplistic rhetoric to attract audiences. In his July 2017 live debate with the Donbas warlord Igor Strelkov, for instance, he presented Putin's elites as cosmopolitan, "without kin or tribe" (*bez roda i plemeni*) – a classic line of anti-Semitic nationalists accusing the Russian government to be foreign to the country. Navalny has thus been vehemently criticized by other nationalist figures, who accuse him of betraying the cause of the Russian nation, but he annoys non-nationalist liberals who are shocked by his cheap xenophobia and his solidarity with the far right.

Natsdem figures are, nonetheless, self-consistent in negating Russia's specific path and anchoring the country within a fully assumed pan-European framework. As in Western and Central Europe, these new formulations of the social contract, which rely on xenophobic populism, have ideologically failed to elaborate a new doctrinal corpus, but are a tactical success in conveying the identity anxieties of a relatively large segment of the population and transforming them into an electorate. The Russian *Natsdem*, just like some of their counterparts in Western and Central Europe, confirm that democracy can be intolerant toward certain groups and illiberal in its main values.

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9 The three colors of Novorossiya, or the mythmaking of the Ukrainian war[1]

The crisis in Ukraine has had a significant impact on Russia's domestic landscape, more so than the 2011–2012 anti-Putin protests when minority "liberals" and "nationalists" came together to denounce the regime. While the annexation of Crimea boosted Putin's popularity at home, the Donbas insurgency shattered the domestic ideological status quo: the Kremlin's position appeared somehow hesitant, fostering the resentment of nationalist circles that were hoping for a second annexation or conquest of eastern Ukraine. At the same time, the large consensus gained by the regime around its management of the Ukrainian crisis helped consolidate popular geopolitics,[2] where Russia is depicted as a country under siege, having to fight for its great-power status to be recognized against a large coalition of enemies, and whose territorial expansion – real with Crimea, symbolic with Donbas – has been sacralized.[3]

One of the most eloquent engines of this gamechanger is the spread of the concept of Novorossiya. In this chapter, I explore this term as a live mythmaking process orchestrated between March and September 2014 – when the Minsk I Agreements were signed – by different Russian nationalist circles. The concept not only legitimizes the insurgency, but also has broader implications for the Russian political landscape, as it carries multiple, overlapping ideological meanings, ranging from paralleling the official narrative to calls to overthrow the Putin regime. Novorossiya exemplifies the exceptional convergence of three underlying paradigms. The first can be defined as "post-Soviet," in the sense that it develops new concepts to reformulate Russia's great-powerness and messianism. The second one is inspired by Tsarist nostalgia and the reactivation of ultraconservative Orthodox circles that benefit from the Kremlin's "conservative turn." The third paradigm comes from the European fascist tradition and claims that Novorossiya will be the battleground that gives birth to a new national revolution overthrowing the old world order. The complexity of these three paradigms resides in their overlapping doctrines, trajectories, and networks. I conclude by examining the long-term impact of the Novorossiya mythmaking – namely, its role in attempting to reunify "red," "white," and "brown" nationalisms.

A brief history of "Novorossiya"

Use of the term Novorossiya has been documented since the end of the eighteenth century. It designates the regions north of the Black Sea that Catherine the Great won from the Ottoman Empire during the Russo-Turkish wars of 1768–1774. In the nineteenth century, Novorossiya was the name of the general governorate in Odessa. For a few months in 1918, a pro-Russian, self-proclaimed Donetsk–Krivoy Rog Soviet Republic, headquartered in Lugansk, sought to protect industrial regions from the then-independent Ukrainian central government, before being disbanded by the Bolsheviks with the creation of Soviet Ukraine.[4] As Ralph Clem and several other scholars have noted, as of the 1926 census the regions grouped under the Novorossiya label – Odesa, Mykolaiv, Kirovohrad, Dnipropetrovsk, Kherson, Zaporizhya, Donetsk, and Luhansk (to use their Ukrainian variants) – had only about 17 percent of their population who self-defined as ethnic Russian: a majority declared their ethnicity as Ukrainian, with some important Jewish, Romanian, and Tatar minorities.[5] Ethnic Russians arrived en masse later, during the Soviet industrial development of the region.

The term Novorossiya seems to have re-emerged in 1994 among Transnistrian separatists, who wanted to substantiate their right to join the Russian Federation. In his book *Post-Imperium*, the director of the Moscow Carnegie Center, Dmitri Trenin, stated, without providing additional detail, that in the mid-2000s:

> Some not entirely academic quarters in Moscow played with the idea of a major geopolitical redesign of the northern Black Sea area, under which southern Ukraine, from the Crimea to Odessa, would secede from Kiev and form a Moscow-friendly buffer state, "Novorossiya."[6]

The term then disappeared for two decades before reemerging in March 2014. It was not uttered by Putin during his famous speech of March 18, 2014, endorsing Crimea's annexation, as the peninsula is not part of Novorossiya; it has a legitimacy of its own. In his declaration, the president stirred historical memory and invoked great-power status by recalling the glorious feats of the Russian army in Crimea – during the Ottoman wars, the Crimean War (1853–1856), and World War II – and the importance of the port of Sevastopol to Russia's strategic autonomy.[7] However, Putin did use the term in his April 17, 2014, speech, when he described the situation of the Russian-speaking population of Ukraine:

> I would like to remind you that what was called Novorossiya (New Russia) back in the tsarist days – Kharkov, Lugansk, Donetsk, Kherson, Nikolayev, and Odessa – were not part of Ukraine back then. These territories were given to Ukraine in the 1920s by the Soviet government. Why? Who knows. They were won by Potemkin and Catherine the Great in a series of well-known wars. The center of that territory was Novorossiysk, so the region is called Novorossiya. Russia lost these territories for various reasons, but the people remained.[8]

Putin has not used the term again; instead, Novorossiya has been promoted by actors outside the Presidential Administration. On May 24, 2014, the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics decided to unite as a new "Union of Novorossiya." On August 29, Putin issued a statement addressed to the "Insurgents of Novorossiya," but the actual text does not use that specific phrasing, instead unassumingly mentioning "the representatives of Donbas."[9] In his address to the Federal Assembly on December 4 of the same year, Putin underlined the meaning of Crimea's reintegration, adding some religious overtones by using the ancient name of the region, Chersonesus, and equating its importance for Russia to that of Temple Mount in Jerusalem for followers of Islam and Judaism.[10] Here, too, the word Novorossiya was absent. Nor did Putin mention the situation in Donbas, referring instead only to the broad "Ukrainian crisis." Novorossiya was engineered by other circles, further from the state authorities.

Red Novorossiya: consolidating Russia's great-powerness

I label the first ideological motif behind the mythmaking of Novorossiya as "red," since it emphasizes the memory of the Soviet Union in promoting a large unified territory, great-powerness, opposition to the West, and a socialist mission. For some Russian nationalist circles, Novorossiya is both a spatial and an ideological justification for Russia's legitimate reassertion of great-power status: it includes new territories that were unjustly lost in 1991 and a new socialist mission in the industrial region of Donbas. This "red" interpretation of Novorossiya is mostly the product of two ideologists: the territorial reasoning comes from Aleksandr Dugin and the socialist claim from Alexander Prokhanov. But both views resonate widely with Russia's population and with the Kremlin, which helps explain the overlapping aspects of their storylines.

Crafting Red Novorossiya: the role of the Izborskii Club

The Izborskii Club has been very vocal during the Ukrainian crisis, and Prokhanov felt personally connected to the events happening in Donetsk and Lugansk. In an August 2014 interview, he boasted about his close ties with the Novorossiya leadership:

> All the current military elites of Novorossiya have written for my newspapers, *Den'* and *Zavtra*. Aleksandr Borodai is my preferred author; he wrote crucial articles from the Chechen front. Igor Ivanovich Strelkov is also one of my authors. Pavel Gubarev, I call him often, he reads my newspapers, books, articles, we totally share the same viewpoints, he is a comrade. These people are like my younger brothers.[11]

The Izborskii Club went well beyond simple discursive support for Donbas secessionism; rather, it was directly involved on the ground during the first months of the insurgency. The Club's main representative there was Aleksandr

Borodai (1972), a former prime minister and deputy prime minister of the self-proclaimed Donetsk Republic. He had volunteered to fight in Transnistria in 1992, when he was just 19, and then became a journalist, covering the first war in Chechnya for RIA Novosti and, after 1996, for Prokhanov's weekly, *Zavtra.*[12] In 2014, he became an adviser to the pro-Russian governor of Crimea, Sergei Aksionov (1972), and then went to Luhansk at Strelkov's request. Borodai is the son of a respected philosopher, Iurii Borodai (1934–2006), who was a friend of Lev Gumilev. Prokhanov has confirmed that he met Aleksandr at a very young age through his acquaintance with the elder Borodai.[13] Prokhanov's enthusiasm for Borodai may be due to their similar career paths: Prokhanov became known for his war reporting during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and has always valued the romantic notion of intellectuals taking up arms. In December 2011, the two men founded an online television station, *Den'-TV*, which sought to be a patriotic answer to the liberal atmosphere of the anti-Putin protests.[14]

Borodai is also acquainted with Dugin through the *Zavtra* network; their relationship has varied over the years. The two men hit a rough spot in June 2014, when Borodai sharply disapproved of Dugin's criticism of the Kremlin and challenged him to stop talking and offer real assistance.[15] The two later "reconciled" online.[16] While Dugin himself did not travel to Donbas in the first months of the war, many members of his Eurasianist Union of Youth (ESM) went to fight alongside the insurgents. The ESM Facebook page actively recruited online.[17] The best-known Eurasianist in Donbas, Aleksandr Proselkov (1982–2014), led the Rostov-on-Don branch of the ESM from the 2000s, and also founded a local branch of the Izborskii Club. He became deputy foreign minister of the Donetsk Republic but was killed on July 31, 2014 near Luhansk.[18] Borodai also has claimed, without elaboration, to be a long-time friend of the famous journalist Mikhail Leontev, who has always championed Dugin.[19]

In June 2014, the Izborskii Club agreed to advise the Donetsk Republic in drafting its constitution and even provided a first document,[20] which has not been acted upon. The Club officially opened a branch in Donetsk, comprised of a dozen or so local university professors and led by Pavel Gubarev (1983). Dugin and Prokhanov attended the opening via videoconference.[21] In August, Borodai ceded the post of Donetsk prime minister to Aleksandr Zakharchenko (1976–2018), leader of Oplot, a martial arts club promoting pan-Slavic ideas that constitutes one of the main units of the Donbas People's Militia.[22] Between the summer and fall of 2014, Borodai and, consequently, the Izborskii Club lost their behind-the-scenes advisory role in Donetsk as the Kremlin and the Russian military sought to bring the secessionist authorities under more direct control. However, the process of crafting ideologies continued.

A new "large Russia" in the making

Aleksandr Dugin has been the driving force generating the territorial meaning of Novorossiya, by proposing merging the Kremlin's two main foreign policy canons for the post-Soviet space – those of "Eurasian Union" and "Russian

World." Until the Ukrainian crisis, the two concepts were considered mutually exclusive. The first one sees Russia as the leader of a multicultural Eurasia promoting deeper integration with the Central Asian republics, whereas the second emphasizes Russia as a "divided nation" that must defend its compatriots abroad.[23] As early as 2013, Dugin began working to demonstrate the complementarity of the two narratives. His Eurasianist International Movement was awarded a presidential grant to launch a new website, called "Eurasia's Russian World" (*Russkii mir Evrazii*). The site, which singles out the "hot spots" of eastern Ukraine, Crimea, and Transnistria, was conceived as a news portal offering information from the post-Soviet republics, and it focuses on the plight of Russians and Russian-speaking minorities outside the Russian Federation.[24]

Dugin has also tested new concepts in an effort to russify his calls for Eurasian expansion and to make them more palatable to public opinion. One such concept, mentioned in his interview with noted television journalist Vladimir Pozner in April 2014, is *Bol'shaia Rossiia* (Large Russia).[25] Dugin reclaimed the term from Iurii Krupnov (1961)[26] and applied it to the 2014 situation, outlining the annexation of Crimea as the beginning of the "reassembly of Russian lands" (*sobiranie russkikh zemel'*), a powerful historical allusion to the rebirth of Russia after Mongol domination in the fifteenth century. This metaphor supposedly parallels a new phase of territorial expansion for today's Russia. According to him, *Bol'shaia Rossiia* means "the Russian world, the Russian civilization. I think the territory of the Large Russia approximately overlaps, with some additions and subtractions, the territory of the Russian Empire and of the Soviet Union."[27] When Pozner asked him to specify the exact borders of this *Bol'shaia Rossiia*, Dugin acknowledged excluding the Baltic countries and western Ukraine, but included the South Caucasus, Central Asia, eastern Ukraine, and Transnistria. Even if the notion of *Bol'shaia Rossiia* had not taken hold among the Russian public, Dugin's strategy to russify the concept of "Eurasia," often accused of betraying Russia's national interests in favor of backward, peripheral regions, will probably come back to the forefront of ideological battlefields in the coming years.

Dugin also launched a Novorossiya website,[28] which gave him unique visibility to users searching online for information about the situation in eastern Ukraine. Dugin and Gubarev wrote most of the site's content. Smaller Eurasianist movements, such as Young Eurasia (*Molodaia Evraziia*), led by Iurii Kofner (1988), likewise promote the Novorossiya concept (which they further apply to other Ukrainian territories and Transnistria) as a first step toward reconstituting Eurasia. However, more in tune with the Kremlin's narrative, Young Eurasia tries to avoid the whiff of imperialism and modestly invited Novorossiya to join the Eurasian Union as a federal republic – with the same status as Belarus and Kazakhstan. Unlike Dugin's group, Young Eurasia is explicitly nonviolent and has proposed a list of peaceful activities for defending Novorossiya.[29]

Novorossiya as new socialist Russia

Alexander Prokhanov offers a different take on this "red" Novorossiya, one focused on Russia's traditional messianism and anti-Westernism. He is supported in this reading by many other members of the Club, including Vitalii Averianov, who summarized the general opinion by claiming, "Novorossiya is the answer of the Russian world, the Russian civilization to the Western aggression."[30] Prokhanov openly insists that he is not encouraging an interpretation of Novorossiya on the basis of political Orthodoxy, stating:

> There was the idea of making Orthodoxy the state religion [of Novorossiya – ML] but I think that, thinking rightly, the new architects of Novorossiya will refuse this idea. Because state religion and clericalization of state structures, that is a dangerous thing.[31]

Prokhanov prefers to emphasize economic issues and Russia's socialist mission. Novorossiya:

> will be above all a non-oligarchic state. Big owners such as Akhmetov will be expelled … I went to see the huge industries there that work with Russia. They are the products of Soviet impulse, of Soviet elites. They are the future industry of Novorossiya, this is a powerful industry which will cooperate with Russia.[32]

To Prokhanov, Novorossiya is a renewed form of the Soviet Union, which will be liberated from oligarchs, have its enterprises renationalized, and see a new Russian socialism emerge. Many other Club members share this viewpoint, but often in a very catch-all interpretation that combines all the ideological arguments. Averianov states, for instance, that "the ideology of Novorossiya will be built on three principles: Russian identity – brotherhood of Eastern Slavs, Orthodoxy, and an *avant-garde* socialist construction."[33] This leftist, oligarchy-free interpretation of Novorossiya has been also displayed by the Club's economists, Sergei Glaziev and Mikhail Delyagin.

Among the other proponents of Novorossiya as a new socialist Russia one may also find some leftist nationalist movements and, especially, the Limonovtsy. The "Other Russia" party opened an office in Donetsk, and Limonov himself has regularly written about his support for the Donetsk and Lugansk authorities.[34] He was hoping for a general insurrection by the Russian-speaking population of Ukraine that would herald the beginning of a larger revolution in Russia itself. His paramilitary section Interbrigade (a reference to the Communist international brigades) recruited and sent volunteers to Donbas.[35] The movement was said to have its own "corridor" of access to eastern Ukraine and a small training base near Rostov-on-Don.[36]

White Novorossiya: building an Orthodox theocracy

The second ideological motif legitimizing Novorossiya is less popular. It is motivated by political Orthodoxy, a trend that claims a worldview inspired by religious precepts.[37] It sees Orthodox Christianity as a civilizational principle that makes Russia a distinct country with strong religious values that should shape the theocratic nature of the regime. The main heralds of this interpretation are personalities such as Natalia Narochnitskaia and Father Tikhon, but the category also contains myriad small political Orthodox groups. In other contexts, such as Serbia, this trend could be described as "black" – as used, for instance, by Norman Cigar in his analysis of Slobodan Milošević's ideological symbiosis between communism, the Serbian Orthodox Church, and some paramilitary groups.[38] But in the Russian context, expressions of political Orthodoxy are traditionally symbolized by the color white, in reference to the White movement opposing the Bolshevik Revolution.

A shade of Romanov nostalgia

One of the main ideological purveyors of this brand of political Orthodoxy is the news portal Russian Popular Line (*Russkaia narodnaia liniia*), whose slogan "Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationality" is borrowed from the reign of Nicholas I (1825–1855). Its editor-in-chief, Anatolii Stepanov (1961), was close to Metropolitan Ioann Snychev and has published many pieces devoted to the Black Hundreds and major monarchist figures.[39] He is a founding member of another institution, the Popular Council (*Narodnyi sobor*), connected to the Moscow Patriarchate.[40] These monarchist movements fall under the protective umbrella of the International Fund for Slavic Writing and Culture, created in 1989 with the blessing of then-Patriarch Aleksii II.[41] The political Orthodoxy groups have personal connections with senior clerics at the Moscow Patriarchate, which directly or indirectly supports them. Patriarch Kirill has been at the forefront of integrating Crimea into his encompassing vision of a "Holy Russia," already celebrating its role in Russia's Christian baptism as early as 2009.[42]

All of these Orthodox movements make use of Tsarist imagery, including pictures of Nicholas II and his family. Many of their members are associated with monarchist groups linked to the Romanovs. Their visions of Novorossiya are profoundly shaped by their references to Tsarism: they hope for the restoration of autocracy (as it existed prior to the revolutions of 1905 or February 1917, depending on the group) and encourage a (quasi)religious reading of the Maidan events in Ukraine that conflates them with "diabolical" action against Holy Russia. The Ukrainian state is decried as an artificial construct sponsored by the Bolsheviks to weaken Russia. Many of the insurgent groups are rooted in the same ideological brand. One of them, the "Russian Orthodox Army," stresses its religious identity. Its fighters added an Orthodox cross to the Novorossiya flag and present themselves as "crusaders" and "soldiers of Christ" (*voiny khristovye*). Their website justifies violence, stating, "Orthodoxy is the religion of the

strong."[43] On one of the official sites of the Donetsk Republic, ikorpus.ru, an anonymous text declares, "Above all, we are fighting for Christ, transmitted to us by our parents and ancestors."[44] Igor Strelkov, the most famous Donbas warlord, known for trying to restore order within the ranks of insurgents and demanding a more hierarchical chain of command, substantiated military order with religious arguments. At the end of July 2014, a few days before his resignation, he prohibited the use of obscene language among his troops, alleging that Russia's enemies used obscenities to insult holy icons, and thus this practice should be considered a sin.[45]

Even if their ideological background is only vaguely formalized, the massive presence of Cossack troops in eastern Ukraine favors the revival of this "white" reading of Novorossiya. The largest Cossack group to have joined the insurgency – between 2,000 and 4,000 troops – was under the direction of Ataman Nikolai Kozitsyn (1956). This self-proclaimed Cossack National Guard was comprised of Cossacks from both Ukraine and Russia, the latter group having seceded from the regular Don Cossack troops.[46] Relations between the Donetsk government and Kozitsyn's troops were tricky: the former accused them of disobedience, in particular when they took OSCE observers hostage, and they have had a reputation for engaging in massive extortion.[47] However, their media presence and their display of a Cossack "brand" – as the last bearers of Russian national traditions and memory – encourage their association, in public opinion, with the revival of political Orthodoxy.

The crisis in Ukraine happened to coincide with the hundredth anniversary of the outbreak of World War I. Until recently, the Great War had been largely obliterated from collective memory and official commemorations in Russia. It was not until preparations for the centennial that the authorities adopted a more structured approach, to be sure that Russia would not be forgotten in the pan-European commemorations. Paradoxically, the Ukraine-linked visibility of groups referring to political Orthodoxy partly overlaps with this newly rediscovered memory of World War I.[48] As a historian and specialist on the Russian civil war, Strelkov has participated over the years in historical reenactments, playing the role of a White officer. The Imperial flag was often flown at combat sites in the Donbas and at meetings to support Novorossiya in Russia. On August 13, 2014, the previously adopted flag of Novorossiya (red and blue, inspired by the Tsarist naval flag) was downgraded to a battle flag in favor of the Russian imperial white-yellow-black tricolor flag. The secessionist authorities stated that through the adoption of the new flag, used as a symbol of the Russian Empire from 1858 to 1883, they were "integrat[ing] their own history into the historical course of the Russian state."[49] Positive memories of Russia's Tsarist past have thus experienced an unprecedented boost from the Novorossiya mythmaking process.

A Black Hundreds-style revival?

In many regards, this political Orthodoxy draws its inspiration from the Black Hundreds. The memory of the violent anti-Semitic movement has marked

Russia's twentieth century. The Soviet regime denounced it as the embodiment of Tsarist decadence, while it became one of the reference points for rightist émigré interwar groups and for the Soviet rightist underground in the 1960s–1980s. The term resurfaced within the Pamiat movement during the perestroika era, when it was invoked by many small groups that often claimed monarchist influences.[50] One of these, which goes by the same name Black Hundreds, today presents itself as "a patriotic movement of Orthodox Christians created in order to bring the rebirth of Holy Russia and to defend Russian from internal and external enemies."[51] It calls for a monarchist regime with Orthodoxy as its official religion and ethnonationalism as its chief political tenet.

Interestingly, a Novorossia.ru website distinct from Dugin's site (the former is .ru, while his is .su), managed by an enigmatic group called the "Orthodox of the Moscow region," was launched as early as 2008. The website calls for the "construction in Russia of a state that pleases God (*bogougodnoe*) in which the fundamental national values will be spiritual and moral, based on Orthodoxy, and not the material and liberal values of a consumer society."[52] The website, which predates the Ukrainian crisis, interprets Novorossiya literally, as the "New Russia," and does not refer to any Ukrainian territory. This website is integrated into a wide group of fringe websites that promote political Orthodoxy and monarchism. This is the case for the movement "For Faith and Fatherland" (*Za veru i otchestvo*),[53] the Russian Imperial Movement (*Russkoe imperskoe dvizhenie*), and the Union of the Russian People (*Soiuz russkogo naroda*), the heir to the movement of the same name that started in 1905 in the same vein as the Black Hundreds.[54]

All advocate for Novorossiya, this time understood as a Donbas insurgency, and many of them recruit online. The Imperial Legion, the paramilitary arm of the Russian Imperial Movement, calls, for instance, for "young Orthodox men" to commit themselves to defending Novorossiya. The movement announced the deaths of some of its fighters in June 2014[55] and sent at least one new brigade of about a dozen people in August.[56] Several related websites advocate anti-Semitism, among them ZhBSI (the Russian abbreviation for "Living without Fear of Jewry," *Zhit' bez strakha iudeska*),[57] confirming the profoundly anti-Semitic convictions of these heirs to the Black Hundreds.

Orthodox "adventurism": the figure of Konstantin Malofeev

A key Russian player in Donbas belongs to this political Orthodoxy network: Konstantin Malofeev. A lawyer by training, Malofeev founded Marshall Capital Partners,[58] an investment fund specializing in the telecommunications market, and has close political and personal connections to former communications minister Igor Shchegolev (1965). Both men appear to have common financial interests in the telecommunications sector and were committed to the so-called Clean Internet project.[59] The aim was both symbolic, in line with the Kremlin's morality turn, and financial: large telecommunication companies would be responsible for developing software to control Internet media outlets.[60]

Since the early 1990s, Malofeev, who was close to Metropolitan Ioann Snychev, has been a leading supporter of the Russian Orthodox Church. He has never hidden his deep monarchist convictions. Using the funds raised by Marshall Capital, he founded the Philanthropic Fund of St. Basil the Great, which sponsors some 30 programs advocating family values (anti-abortion groups, assistance to former convicts and single mothers, etc.), Orthodox religious education, and assistance to Orthodox churches and monasteries.[61] These activities have earned him warm relations with Father Tikhon.[62] Malofeev met Aleksandr Borodai in the 2000s, when Marshall Capital hired his consulting firm for some public relations events.[63] Strelkov was said to have led the investment fund's security service, a claim Malofeev has denied.[64] During the Ukrainian crisis, Malofeev quickly became active on the side of Crimea. His St. Basil the Great Fund provided US$1 million to the pro-Russian mayor of Sevastopol, Aleksei Chalyi (1961), and a similar sum to the Republic of Crimea once it was integrated within the Russian Federation.[65] Malofeev denied funding the Donbas insurgency, saying he simply provides humanitarian assistance in line with an agreement between the St. Basil the Great Fund and the Donetsk Republic.[66] However, his name has been increasingly associated with the insurgency, and he benefits from the support of Father Tikhon, likewise a fervent sympathizer with the secessionist cause in eastern Ukraine.

Malofeev is also close to Dugin. The two men first met in the late 1990s or early 2000s.[67] In June 2014, the Orthodox businessman financed a so-called secret meeting in Vienna celebrating the two hundredth anniversary of Metternich's Holy Alliance. The occasion brought together Dugin, the well-known nationalist painter Ilia Glazunov, and the leaders of several European far-right and monarchist groups: Aymeric Chauprade, then right-hand man of Marine Le Pen in the French Front National; Prince Sixtus Henry of Bourbon-Parma, leader of the Catholic-monarchist Carlist movement in Spain; Heinz-Christian Strache, chairman of the far-right populist Freedom Party in Austria, and his colleague Johann Herzog; Volen Siderov, the chairman and founder of the far-right Ataka party in Bulgaria; several right-wing extremists from Croatia; and Georgian and Russian noblemen.[68] At first glance, these contacts may seem disparate, but they are united in campaigning for the establishment of a European conservative international that would bring together monarchists, far-right parties, Catholics, and Orthodox groups. Malofeev has cultivated these European networks for several years and tried to advance his projects through the new dynamics created by the Donbas insurgency.[69]

Brown Novorossiya: exporting the neo-fascist revolution

The third ideological thread feeding the Novorossiya concept is the "Russian Spring" (*Russkaia vesna*). Unlike the first two motifs, this one does not enjoy any Kremlin support because the Putin regime – rightly – considers itself to be the movement's next target. Indeed, this "Russian Spring" motif claims that Russian national revolution should not only fight Kyiv, but also be exported to Moscow. Although this third paradigm is openly anti-regime while the two

previous ones are not, its narrative is often superimposed on, or parallel to, the two others. Moreover, it brings together people with contrasting views: National Democrats such as Konstantin Krylov and neo-Nazi groups. Otherwise at opposite extremes of the nationalist spectrum, both use the term "Russian Spring" to call for a popular uprising against the current regime.

The long-awaited "Russian Spring"

The Russian Spring movement plays on the dual significance of Novorossiya: it announces the birth of a New Russia both geographically, in eastern Ukraine, and metaphorically, in Russia itself. Once again, Dugin has been one of the driving forces beyond this interpretation of Novorossiya, offering the most elaborate narrative:

> The new party of Pavel Gubarev [called Novorossiya–ML] embodies the way to a Russian future, the path to the New Russia. Novorossiya here has both a direct and a metaphorical sense. Russia itself should be reborn, become another, cleanse, wake up, come back to its Russian, Eurasian identity. In freeing Novorossiya from Kiev's junta, the Russian heroes free Russia itself from the leftovers of the 1990s, the oligarchic system, Western influence, and spiritual and moral decadence.[70]

Dugin carefully avoids threatening Putin in person and confines himself to targeting his inner circle. To justify this ambivalence, he explains: "Putin embodies simultaneously Crimea and hesitations on Donbas. He is simultaneously Glaziev and Kudrin, Rogozin and Surkov, Sechin and Dvorkovich. He combines in himself contradictions that cannot coexist anymore."[71] Dugin has thus sought to open a new front in the ideological war for Novorossiya, this time a domestic one. A champion of denouncing the liberal and pro-Western "fifth column," with the Novorossiya concept he creates a "sixth column" of internal enemies – the Kremlin's modernizers. These consist of:

> those who are for Putin and for Russia but for a liberal, modernizing and Westernizing Russia, for its globalization and integration into the Western world. … The sixth column is not enemies of Putin but his supporters … they don't attack him at each of his patriotic moves, they support him.[72]

Dugin particularly targets Vladislav Surkov as the sixth column's leader, as well as then Deputy Prime Minister Arkadii Dvorkovich (1972) and Sergei Kurginian (1949), a nationalist publicist who rallied to the regime. For Dugin, Moscow's hesitancies to intervene in the Donbas can only be explained by the hidden competition between the real patriots and the sixth column. He is concerned that the Malofeev line, dominant during the first two months of the war, has since lost the upper hand to Surkov, who turned down the opportunities for military intervention in – and annexation of – the Donbas.[73]

The Dugin-style "Russian Spring" has the explicit goal of exporting the national revolution to Moscow. Many traits allow for this Russian Spring narrative to be associated with the fascist tradition. First, it calls for a totalitarian revolution that would transform society, overthrow current regimes, and start over with a *tabula rasa*. It sublimates violence, filling the Russian nationalist Internet and social media world with images of volunteers in khaki uniforms, proudly displaying their weapons and posing in macho ways around tanks or destroyed military equipment. The narrative – and the nationalist hard rock music – that accompanies these images promotes violence, sacrifice, and death in the name of the greater national cause. Second, it combines the classic traits of almost all fascist movements: a leftist-style discourse that denounces corporations and oligarchs and an obsessive story-telling on the "dangers" threatening the survival of the nation.

Many groups of nationalist volunteers active in the Donbas display fascist symbols, offering all possible variations of the swastika. These include the neo-Nazi group Restrukt, famous for its anti-immigrant violence. Another example of fascist references is the Variagi brigade (referring to the Varangians who conquered Novgorod and participated in founding the first Russian state), which was sent by the Eurasianist Falanges, with the eagle of the 1920s German National Bolsheviks as its emblem.[74] Anti-Semitic slogans, revolving mostly around the need to get rid of the "international Jewry" represented by Kyiv and its oligarchs, have also increased in frequency. In an interview with Open Revolt, an English-language website that calls for a revolt of the white working classes, Dugin celebrates the "fight to the death" against Ukrainian nationalism and especially Right Sector, which "serves the Jewish oligarch Kolomoyski."[75] He also denounced the election of President Petro Poroshenko: "Nationalists, who were giving the tone on Maidan, said they need to have a Ukrainian as a president. As a result, they elected a Jew, and not a Slav, whoever he could be."[76] On May 28, 2014, he stated that "Ukraine is in the hands of homosexuals and Jewish bankers,"[77] and on several occasions he has denounced the Jewish origins of Ukrainian oligarchs.[78]

Many websites promoting the "Russian Spring" are associated with both Russian- and English-speaking portals from the fascist anti-globalization movement. They combine a discourse condemning Western capitalism and liberalism with support for the Islamist cause, and therefore sometimes add an Islamic veneer to their anti-Semitism.

The myth of the RNE renaissance

This "brown" reading of Novorossiya was amplified by the media hype surrounding the alleged rebirth of Barkashov's Russian National Unity (RNE) party alongside the Donbas insurgency. The RNE is a unique case of a defunct nationalist organization whose name became such a brand that it can be instantly reactivated, based only on its faded glory.

The movement's website, soratnik.com, dormant since 2006, was relaunched with the crisis in Ukraine. Many central figures in Donetsk have referred,

directly or indirectly, to the RNE. The most famous of them, Pavel Gubarev, a prominent spokesman with multiple titles (leader of the Donbas militia, governor of the Donetsk People's Republic, its foreign affairs minister, and the founder of the Novorossiya party), claimed to lead the RNE section in Donetsk. He thanked the movement for providing him with military training in the early 2000s, and videos from the RNE congress confirm his attendance.[79] However, there is no reliable information about when the RNE affiliates in Ukraine were created.[80] An RNE office is said to have opened at the central administration of Donetsk in the early months of the insurrection. Dmitrii Boitsov, leader of the so-called Orthodox Donbas organization, is rumored to have taken orders from Barkashov.[81] Mikhail Verin, commander of the "Russian Orthodox Army," also is suspected of being close to Barkashov, but these links are mentioned by unreliable Ukrainian sources, and the movement's Facebook page displays no particular link to the RNE.[82] The fact that Barkashov did celebrate the insurgents' actions on his Facebook page does not mean that they took orders from him.

The neo-Nazi international fighting in Donbas

The "brown" element of the Donbas insurgency relies on other, less known, and more fragmented neo-Nazi groups. Several dozen foreigners, who are neither Ukrainian nor Russian, fight in Donbas, many of them with neo-Nazi views. Donbas insurgents have received the support of dozens of individuals from Italy, France, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and the Baltic states.[83] Serbian troops appear to be the most numerous, followed by Belarusians and former Soviet citizens from Kazakhstan, Armenia, Uzbekistan, and so on, mostly interested in personally experiencing war.[84] Among the Western European fighters, some young people from France and Italy are identifiable as close to radical far-right groups such as Les Identitaires or the Italian Eurasianist Youth; others have several years of military experience in the regular army and consider it their duty to fight against what they see as NATO and US involvement in Ukraine to weaken Russia. Some of them also mention the need to defend the white race, symbolized by Putin's leadership, against the decadence of corrupt European and US elites and their promotion of all kinds of ethnic and sexual minorities.[85]

Interestingly, Russian neo-Nazi groups were divided by the Ukrainian crisis. The majority support the Russian side over the Ukrainian one, but call for Novorossiya to remain free and avoid unification with a corrupt Russia. A minority saw in Maidan a genuine democratic revolution against a corrupt regime backed by Putin and has since supported the Ukrainian government.[86] This is the case, for instance, for some members of Restrukt who have joined the Ukrainian Right Sector and its different brigades. The Russkie movement was also very divided. Some of its members left to join the Donbas insurgency, but the Facebook page of the movement was more focused on defending political prisoners and criticizing the Kremlin than on Novorossiya. For Demushkin, Novorossiya is a lost fight, as it is backed by a corrupt and inefficient Russian regime.[87] This opinion

is shared by Egor Prosvirnin (1986), the founder of the website "Sputnik and Pogrom" (sputnikipogrom.com), who was very critical of the insurgency's ability to succeed and the Putin regime's chances of becoming a responsible stakeholder in the defense of ethnic Russians. Within the Russkie movement, some pro-Ukrainians created Russkii Sektor, which stands with Kyiv and denounced the Kremlin in a way inspired by the 2011–2012 anti-Putin protests.[88] Some Russian neo-Nazis are also involved in the Azov battalion, under the command of the Ukrainian Interior Ministry.[89] They stand alongside neo-Nazis coming from all over Europe, particularly Sweden, Italy, Germany, and Finland, to help Ukraine against Russia.

* * *

One way to interpret the Novorossiya mythmaking is to compare it with the October 1993 fight for the Supreme Soviet. For the first time since then, Russian nationalists finally have a story that celebrates their achievements in actions, words, images, and music, offering a full complement of heroic battles and martyrs. Igor Strelkov, who transformed into a living icon over several months, fully encapsulates this epic. His face has been "Photoshopped" to adorn various posters or made into cartoons, and a mushrooming cult of personality has taken shape.[90]

The parallel between the October 1993 events and the Donbas war are striking. Eastern Ukraine is the successor to Transnistria, then the main war theater for nationalists. The defunct RNE movement even rose from the ashes for the occasion. In both cases, paramilitary groups embody the nationalist fight, benefiting from some personal protection from the security services and the military. The Izborskii Club stands as an ideological successor to the Supreme Soviet and Prokhanov's weekly newspaper *Den'*, trying to synthesize a spectrum of nationalist conservative doctrines into a coherent policy. Today's political Orthodoxy groups and "Orthodox businessmen" update the Black Hundreds legacy of Pamiat that profoundly shaped the Russian nationalist spectrum in the final years of perestroika and the first years of the post-Soviet era.

Novorossiya was a unique theater for Russian nationalism, simultaneously nurturing a "red," "white," and "brown" reading of the events occurring in Donbas. The red one justified the insurgency in the name of an anti-Western geopolitics, Russia's destiny to be a large territory, and the Soviet memory that makes Donbas a region proud of its industrial legacy and showing the way for a new socialist Russia. The white one hoped the current insurgency would open the path to a renewal of political Orthodoxy that would confirm Russia's status as the herald of conservative Christian values and spread nostalgia for the Romanov monarchy. The brown one saw in Donbas a new battlefield where Aryan supremacy could defeat Europe's decadence, and where young people could be trained in urban warfare to prepare to overthrow the regimes in power across Europe.

The three interpretations compete, and partly overlap, in terms of their doctrinal content. Anti-Semitism is one common thread, as Jews can be concurrently

denounced as oligarchs and capitalist bankers, as enemies of Christianity and of Russia, and as polluting the White Aryan race. Anti-Westernism is obviously the second shared doctrinal element, but it is sometimes "softened" due to a complex relationship to Europe. In fact, the second and third ideological themes behind Novorossiya exhibit anti-liberalism but a pro-European posture: through Christian connections for the former, and through the White Power slogan for the latter, they have developed deep interactions with some of their Western European counterparts. These three motives also overlap in some of their networks. Dugin is a producer of both the first and the third interpretations, faithful to his dual Eurasianist and neo-fascist stance. Some youth groups, such as the Russian Imperial Legion, play on both the Black Hundreds and neo-Nazi imagery. Last but not least, the third motif is the most paradoxical, as it reveals an open fracture within the neo-Nazi groups between pro-Ukrainians – still a minority – and pro-Russians.

Putin has disappointed all three Novorossiya camps: they were hoping that Donbas would be integrated with Russia following Crimea's destiny, while Moscow saw the insurgency only as a way to maintain its influence over Ukraine's future. They also had to accept an obvious disappointment – many regions of eastern Ukraine with important Russian-speaking populations did not follow the Donbas path and remained loyal to Kyiv. Since the Minsk agreement, the ideological "nurturers" of Novorossiya have been partly shut down and have lost their media visibility. The process of normalization of Donbas as a second Transnistria under Moscow's stranglehold has been successful: the Kremlin silenced the more radical figures linked to the Novorossiya cause and organized Strelkov's removal from his pedestal, while being cautious to avoid any uncontrolled "heroization" of the insurgents and of the fallen soldiers. The Russian regime has thus succeeded in keeping these nationalist forces in check. Yet the Novorossiya storyline validated a new kind of geopolitical adventurism and blurred the boundaries, both territorial and imaginary, of the Russian state, with possible boomerang effects that are difficult to forecast.

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